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Commanders see war in its entirety

Great military commanders need a comprehensive overview of the battlefield as well as an eye for its tiny details. Many of World War II's warlords – field marshals, generals and admirals – have mastered this art, while others have failed miserably. In many cases, their success or failure has been perceived to be a result of their character traits. For instance, Arthur Percival has gone down in history as the general who lost Singapore due to British arrogance, while Field Marshal Erich von Manstein stuck to his ideals as a Prussian officer and became an admired strategist throughout the world.

Neither of these views is entirely fair or accurate.

In this special edition we have brought together comprehensive accounts of the most important warlords of World War II. Big names like Rommel, MacArthur and Zhukov have an obvious place in such a collection, but we have also included less well-known commanders. These men may not have left such a mark on history, but they still have much to teach us about how great warlords are made, and, perhaps more importantly, how they fall.

Enjoy!

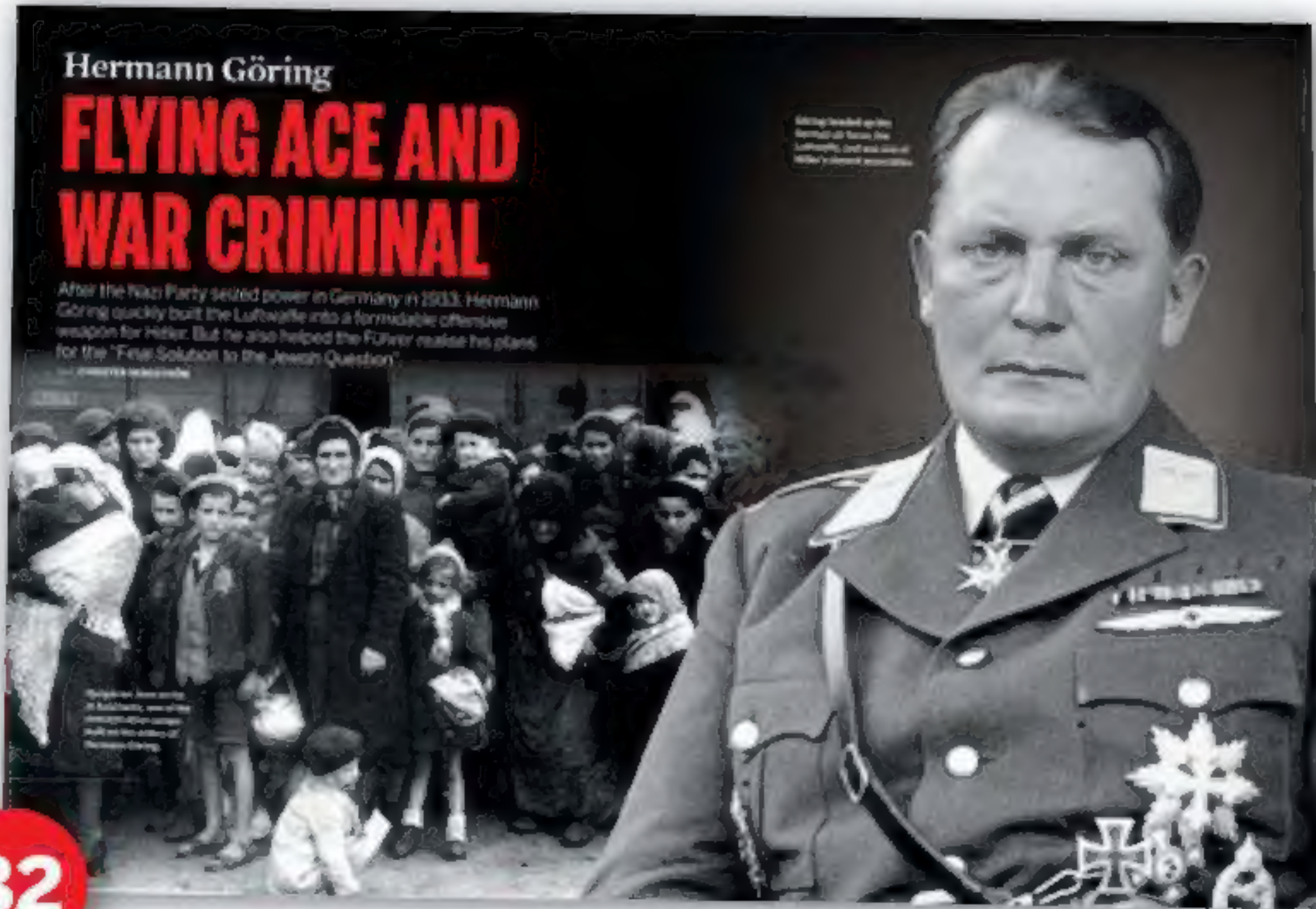
CONTENTS

WORLD WAR II'S WARLORDS

6	Erwin Rommel
22	Albert Kesselring
32	Hermann Göring
42	Erich von Manstein
50	Heinz Guderian
60	Bernard Law Montgomery
72	Arthur Percival
76	Dwight D Eisenhower
94	George Patton
100	Douglas MacArthur
106	Georgy Zhukov
114	Masaharu Homma
118	Isoroku Yamamoto

Soldiers from the 19th Indian Infantry Division greet General Slim (in the jeep, left) in Mandalay, 1945.





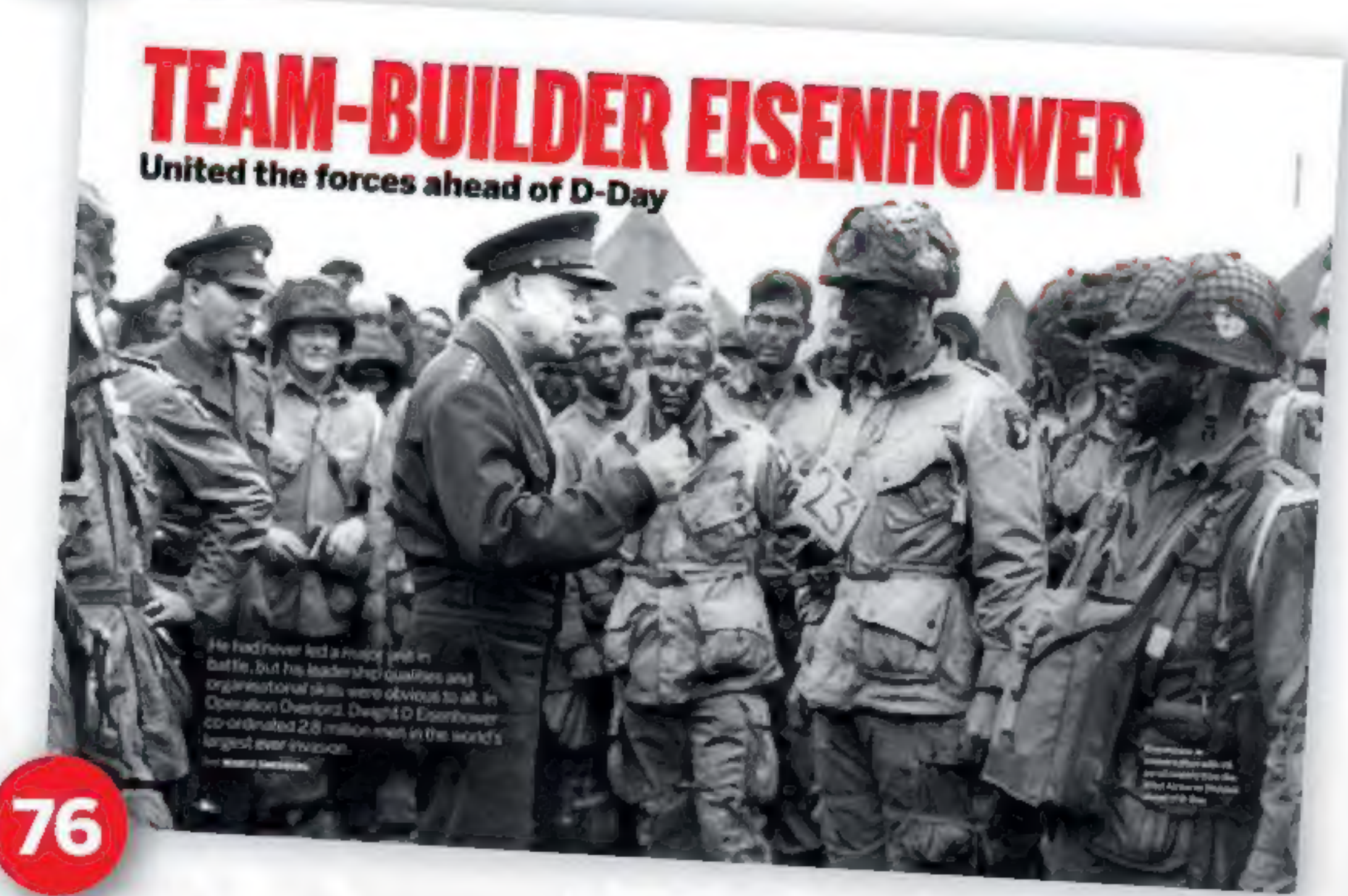
32



42



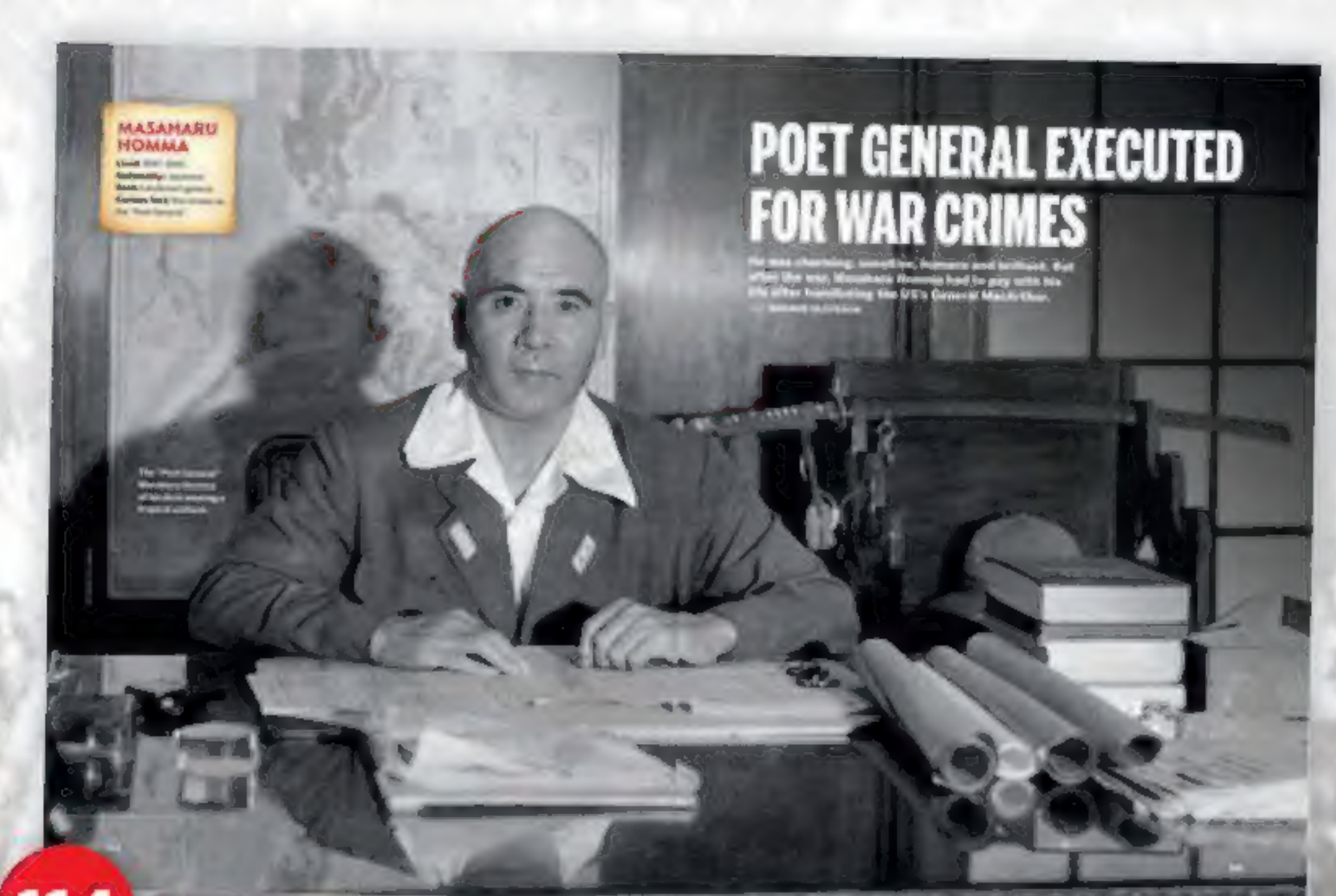
60



76



106



114



Erwin Rommel

ADMIRER BY HIS

Erwin Rommel's tactics and command philosophy were simple: make quick decisions and put them into action immediately. This enabled the **Desert Fox** to stay one step ahead of his opponents, and won the legendary field marshal the admiration of both sides during his career.

Text: **JOHAN LUPANDER**

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (pointing) posed major problems for the British in North Africa thanks to his use of mobile warfare. Tunisia, March 1943.

"76 years after his death ... Rommel remains a unique, almost unfathomable figure"

OPPONENTS

“We have a very daring and skilful opponent against us ... and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general,” Winston Churchill said in January 1942. Today, 76 years after his death, the German field

marshal Erwin Rommel remains a unique, almost unfathomable figure. After all, how many military leaders receive plaudits from their enemies in the midst of a bitter war, or go on to become the subject of more positive appraisals and biographies by their former opponents than in their native country?

Erwin Rommel is probably the best-remembered German military commander of World War II. The ►



► interest, not to mention admiration, that he attracts is almost unique in the way that it spans national borders. This may be due, in part, to the fact that Rommel, as a human being, is something of an enigma. His military exploits can also be read in different ways. Together, these two factors have contributed to an enduring, almost mythical legacy growing up around him. Anyone who wants to get closer to the truth about Rommel immediately hits difficulties in filtering the very rich but sometimes contradictory source material about the elusive commander.

Rommel was born in 1891 in south-west Germany to a bourgeois family with no military background. His father was a headmaster. As a child, Erwin Rommel was sickly and didn't particularly excel at school or anywhere else. In his teens, however, he began to show both a talent for mathematics and an aptitude for engineering, and expressed a desire to work in aeronautics. The fact that this pasty-faced youth entered the military is said to have been due to pressure from his father, who believed the fledgling air industry couldn't be relied upon. The army, on the other hand, was a common career path for young men who didn't show any special abilities.

In January 1912, after almost two years of officer training, Rommel was accepted as an ensign in an infantry regiment in Weingarten near Lake Constance. That same year, he had a love affair that resulted in a daughter, Gertrud. For various reasons, marriage was deemed to be out of the question.

However, preserved letters attest to how seriously Rommel took his responsibilities, and he added his daughter's mother as a beneficiary in the life insurance that came into force for him at the outbreak of the war.

In the years leading up to the start of World War I, Rommel seems to have been transformed. From the very start, the once pale and withdrawn youth proved to possess incredible abilities both as a tactician and as a quick-thinking, charismatic military leader. He was wounded and decorated twice before 1917, when as the company commander in a German mountain battalion, he once again had the chance to demonstrate his qualities, this time on the Italian front. His exploits there resulted in him being awarded the Pour le Mérite medal – Imperial Germany's highest military award.

At the same time, he also began to show another, more questionable side to his character: ambition. Rommel believed, with some justification, that the presentation of the Pour le Mérite medal was overdue and that other officers had 'stolen his glory' by receiving the same award for gallantry on the back of his achievements. The experience left a deep

“At the same time, he also began to show another, more questionable side to his character: ambition”

impression and taught him that it was not enough to be outstanding; any achievements must also be noted by the right people.

At the end of the war, in November 1918, Rommel returned to Germany as a newly promoted captain, seemingly making the transition to peacetime military life as easily as if he was just returning from an unusually long period on manoeuvres. His track record made him an obvious choice for those recruiting the hearts and minds that would help build the *Reichswehr*, Germany's new post-war army, which was limited by the Treaty of Versailles to 4,000 active officers.

For the next nine years, Rommel lived a secluded and apparently happy family life – he had married during the war – and spent most of his working life training troops in an infantry regiment in Stuttgart. Applications for higher-level training were rejected, however, despite the brilliant assessments he received from all his commanders.

Rommel's hobbies were mostly simple: playing the violin, hiking, skiing, horse riding and all kinds of mechanical tinkering. *Reichswehr* staff were banned from participating in any political activity, including voting in general elections. This suited Rommel perfectly, but brought with it a political ignorance that would make things more difficult for him later on.

In 1928, after 12 years of marriage, Rommel's wife had their only child, a son, whom they named Manfred. Rommel and his wife also helped to take care of his daughter, Gertrud, after her mother died. She had grown up with her grandmother nearby, but Rommel had maintained contact with her under the guise of being her uncle.

In 1929, Rommel was ordered to take up a post as an instructor at the infantry school in Dresden. Here, he became an esteemed lecturer who based his lessons on tactics on his own experiences, which gradually became better illustrated over time. He collected this material in a small book – *Infanterie greift an (Infantry Attacks)* – which was published to much acclaim in 1937, with the Swiss Army adopting it as a training manual. The book revealed a literary



Imperial Germany's highest award – Pour le Mérite – was instituted by Frederick the Great in 1740 and presented until 1918.

German stormtroopers take a rest during the Battle of Caporetto in 1917. During the action, Rommel, who was in command of just 150 men, managed to get 9,000 Italians to surrender by exploiting the terrain and attacking from unexpected directions.

and pedagogical talent that would come to the fore again later in his life.

After 14 years as captain, promotion to major finally came in April 1932. His life in the peacetime *Reichswehr* must have seemed clear: he would be stuck in the same post for years, perhaps gaining another promotion shortly before he retired.

But the career opportunities for German officers were about to improve significantly.

Just one year later, Rommel landed a job that could have been tailor-made for him: command of a *jäger* (hunter) battalion in Goslar, in the Harz mountain region. He was there two years, during which time the Nazi Party came to power. In 1935, Rommel was promoted to lieutenant colonel and posted as a senior instructor to the newly established infantry officers' school in Potsdam.

Hitler's rise to power came in the winter of 1933, when he became the leader of a coalition government (after an election in which the Nazis lost 11 percent of their electorate). The change in leadership didn't attract much attention within the *Reichswehr*, however. Even the purges within the Nazi Party's SA divisions in June 1934 were viewed as something positive, because they eliminated an organisation that had ambitions of competing with the

Lieutenant Rommel in Italy in 1917 wearing the Pour le Mérite medal around his neck.

army. There was a tendency by many Germans at this time to perceive the Führer as a blameless man surrounded by nonsense that he would gradually get rid of, a perception that benefited Hitler for a long time. And when the Führer defied the terms of the Versailles Treaty and initiated a rearmament programme in 1935, this could not be seen as anything other than a positive step within the *Reichswehr*, and likewise by Rommel.

In 1936, in addition to lecturing in Potsdam, Rommel temporarily oversaw Hitler's personal security during the Nuremberg rally. He was brought into even closer contact with the German chancellor when the battalion was deployed on Austria's doorstep in March 1938 and then Sudetenland's in the same autumn. By then, Rommel – now a major general – had been appointed as commander of Hitler's military headquarters. Thus

he came into almost daily contact with not only Hitler but also other leading figures in the Nazi Party and military leadership.

Rommel's letters to his wife during this period and even later reveal an astonishingly naive attitude towards Hitler and the various signs he received of the leader's approval. The Führer, for his part, seems to have appreciated ▶

ERWIN ROMMEL



During the Invasion of Poland, Rommel (on Hitler's right) was responsible for the Führer's security. September 1939.

- Rommel because he was a simple man of the people, in contrast to the arrogant aristocrats he mostly dealt with in the military leadership.

One must also remember that Hitler possessed incredible charisma and could easily manipulate those around him. The relatively unsophisticated Rommel was dazzled by the Führer in a way that would affect him for many years.

One of the major turning points in Rommel's career came in November 1939 when Hitler asked him what field command he wanted. Rommel immediately replied: "I want an armoured division!" Rommel's experience hardly qualified him for such a post – command of an infantry division would have been the obvious choice – but as the request had Hitler's blessing, the Army Personnel Office had little choice in the matter. Rommel took command of the 7th Panzer Division in February 1940 and threw himself into the role with characteristic verve, exercising with the unit immediately and learning everything he needed.

When the German attack on the West began on 10th May 1940, the 7th Panzer Division was one



Rommel is forever associated with the German Afrika Korps, which he successfully led. This is its insignia.

of the units that took the lead and created history. Rommel's principles of rapid decision-making, concentrated forces and surprise fitted perfectly within the framework of the blitzkrieg, Germany's 'lightning war', and his unit's rapid advance became almost legendary. Only once could the enemy gather for a counter-attack against the division's unprotected northern flank, but then had the misfortune to come up against Rommel personally. He quickly organised an anti-tank defence that included 88-mm anti-aircraft guns, which stopped the British advance. His bold decisiveness showed itself in other ways, too. When a captured French lieutenant colonel refused three times to follow orders, Rommel had him shot.

His successes not only led to promotion and fame but also brought Rommel to the attention of the Nazi propaganda apparatus. Gradually, he became something of a figurehead in this context, which should have appealed to his ambition. However, the flip side of this fame was that it further inflamed the jealousy of many senior commanders in the German Army. Not least some with noble backgrounds who took every chance to oppose 'the upstart'.

In autumn 1940, Italy's dictator Benito Mussolini foolishly ordered his forces to attack British-controlled Egypt from the Italian colony of

“His unit's rapid advance became almost legendary”

Libya. The British forces repelled the Italians in a bold counter-attack, leading to total confusion and heavy losses among Mussolini's forces. To help save face for his Italian brother-in-arms and avoid the British capturing the colony, Hitler decided to send a limited stabilising force to North Africa. The force's commander was the increasingly renowned Rommel, who would soon gain eternal fame as the Desert Fox.

The battlefield was around 2,000 kilometres long but, in most places, less than ten kilometres wide. From a cultivated coastal strip, which included the region's only reasonably good road, the landscape rose to a vast desert-like plateau of gravel and sand, broken only by a few ridges and dried-up gullies. Visibility stretched for dozens of kilometres when it wasn't obscured by sudden sandstorms, smoke or dust thrown up by vehicles.

Most of the time, there was no opportunity for a commander to anchor his southern flank; it could always be circumvented by an outflanking manoeuvre. In this way, desert warfare was similar to battles at sea, where the possibilities for manoeuvre were virtually limitless. It was a form of warfare that suited Rommel perfectly.

In typical style, Rommel surprised the British when, after landing with a vanguard in Tripoli in February 1941, he began an advance eastward in March. This turned into a full-scale offensive when reinforcements were shipped in. This was the first of many times that Rommel broke an explicit order from the army's high command.

The British resistance was weak, due to the fact that half of their units had been transferred to Greece in February. This decision, which was disastrous for the British, had been made on political grounds by Churchill, who believed a German attack on Greece was imminent.

The Germans, on the other hand, had a stroke of luck when, quite by chance, they captured Britain's three foremost experts on armoured and desert warfare, among them Lieutenant General Richard O'Connor, who had led the successful offensive against the Italians in December and January.

The Germans reached the Egyptian border in mid-April, but the besieged port city and fortress of Tobruk in Libya remained a threat behind them. It was during an attack on Tobruk that Germany's armoured forces were pushed back for the first time, but there was also a second and third time, and Rommel received a demonstration of the difficulties of attacking a determined, well-established opponent.

The Germans tried several times in 1941 to break the siege of Tobruk and suffered heavy losses in moving battles with the Allied forces. It was not ►

German tanks were superior in the desert

★ Rommel saw the technical characteristics of the warring parties' tanks as the most important factor for success in battle – their armour, firepower and mobility. Another important component was the repair and salvage service available for the tanks in the field. As long as a tank had not started to burn, it could usually be restored to a combat-ready condition. The Germans were particularly strong in this regard.

British



The British tanks were initially either cruisers – too light, thinly armoured and poorly armed – or infantry tanks, which were well protected but too slow and insufficiently armed. Their gun, the QF 2 pdr, and its ammunition didn't help matters. With a 40-mm calibre, it was barely acceptable as a weapon against armoured targets, and since no explosive shell was ever produced, it was only of use against poorly protected targets.

This shortcoming was not remedied until US-made M3 Grant tanks were added in the spring of 1942. Their 75-mm guns, however, were mounted in a casemate, which limited their lateral capability. It was not until the US M4 Sherman in the summer of 1942 that the Allies took delivery of a tank that could match the Germans' most common models.

German



The German tank stock (disregarding the substandard Italian tanks, known to the troops as "self-propelled coffins") consisted mainly of the proven, mass-produced Panzer III and IV. The former was armed with a 50-mm gun that could fire all types of ammunition, while the latter had a short 75-mm gun, primarily intended for close infantry support with explosive shells.

In the summer of 1942, a new version of the tank with a long gun came into service, along with a shell with a directed explosive charge for the original short gun. However, neither played a decisive role in the war in North Africa, nor did the famous Tiger tanks. Overall, the German tanks had a good balance between protection and manoeuvrability.



**Crusader II
1942.**



**Panzer III,
1941.**

BUNDESARCHIV, BILD1011/783-0109-117
DÖRNER/CC BY-SA 3.0

Rommel was able to make full use of the technical superiority that German tanks had over their British counterparts prior to the summer of 1942.

ERWIN ROMMEL

The war in North Africa

★ From the Italian invasion of Egypt in 1940 to the Allied victory in 1943.



SEP 1940. The Italians attack Egypt from their colony, Libya.



DEC 1940–FEB 1941. Britain hits back in Operation Compass.



MAR–APR 1941. Afrika Korps arrives. Axis's counter-offensive.

- ▶ until November that the siege ended, when the remaining Allied defenders broke out and linked up with the Eighth Army, which had advanced from Egypt, to push the German and Italian forces all the way back to El Agheila during Operation Crusader.

Now the events of March and April repeated themselves. The Allied units were worn out after the hard fighting, and their advance across more than 500 kilometres had stretched their supply lines to breaking point.

At the same time, Rommel had received significant reinforcements and supplies from Germany. It was no surprise, therefore, that in January 1942, he decided to launch some probing attacks. These succeeded beyond all expectations; the weakened British units retreated, and were unable to stop Rommel before he had regained much of the territory he had lost in the previous months. The Germans advanced as far as

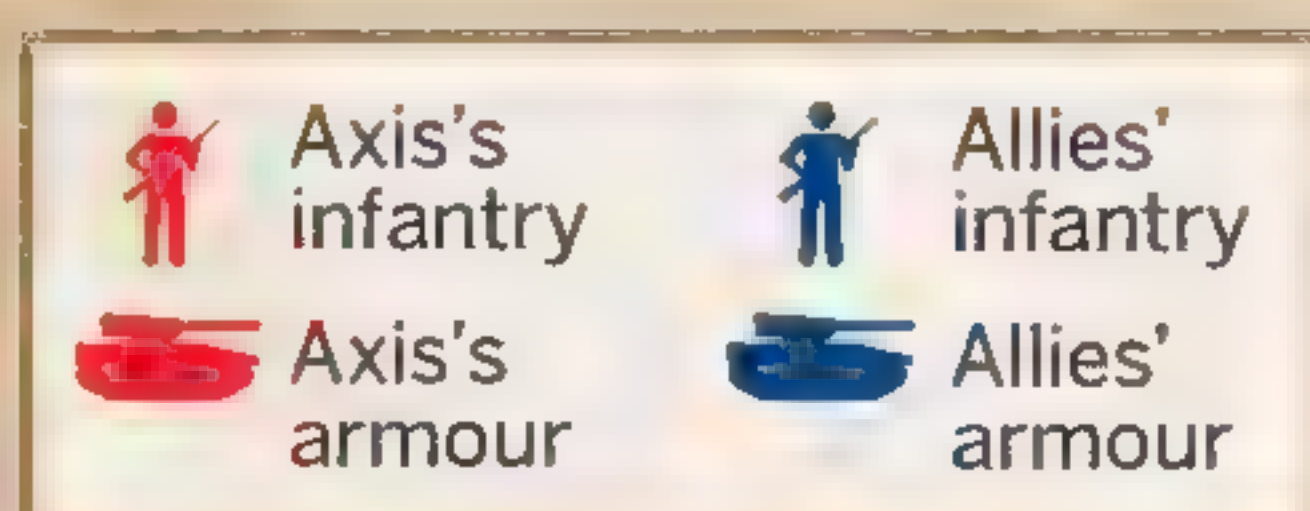
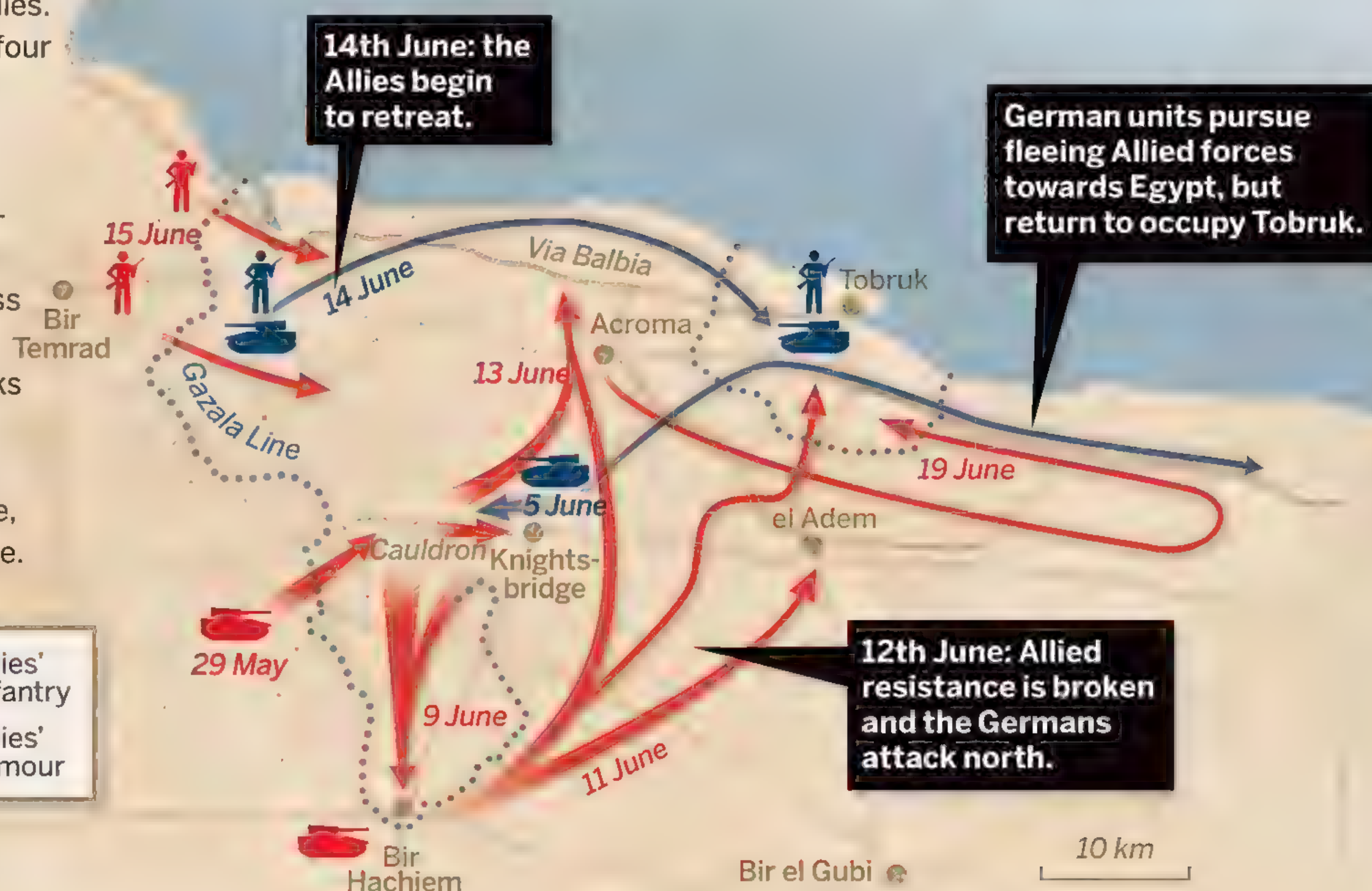
the famous Gazala position at Tobruk. There, the front became stationary while both sides regrouped.

On 26th May 1942, Rommel began the operations that would take him not only across the border into Egypt but also to the height of his career. Through a combination of attacks on enemy key positions and diversionary thrusts, Rommel prompted the Allies to make an armoured counter-attack, which ran headlong into a trap: a line of well-prepared and camouflaged anti-tank defences, which quickly destroyed the British forces' numerical advantage in tanks.

Then it was time to turn to Tobruk again. Rommel had learned from his failed attempts to capture the fortress the year before and had now prepared an assault, supported by dive-bombers, which was based on a feint from the south by Italian forces, while the real attack, by German troops, came from the south-east. The exhausted Australian garrison that had defended Tobruk so well in 1941 had since been replaced by poorly trained South Africans, and the defences had partly fallen into disrepair. This

Battle of Gazala

★ The battle took place from 26th May to 21st June 1942. 90,000 Germans and Italians fought against 110,000 allies. The offensive began with four Italian divisions attacking in the west to tie up Allied forces. At the same time, Rommel had five German-dominated armoured and motorised divisions bypass the Gazala line, which consisted of soldiers, tanks and mines. After heavy fighting, Rommel broke through the Allied defence, taking Tobruk on 21st June.





JUN 1941–JAN 1942. British return and attack again.



JAN–JULY 1942. German-Italian offensives. The Battle of Gazala.



OCT 1942–JAN 1943. Allied victory at El Alamein and in North Africa.

CHRISTOPHER REHN

time Tobruk fell after only a day of fighting. This proved the highlight of Rommel's career and he was promoted to field marshal.

Thanks to the fuel captured at Tobruk, Rommel was now able to attack eastwards once more, this time against an increasingly demoralised enemy. However, the advance ground to a halt when it came up against resolute Allied resistance at El Alamein, which – unlike other defensive positions during the desert war – could not be outflanked to the south because it was anchored on the Qattara Depression, which was considered impassable.

Rommel's last offensive was repulsed in September, and just over a month later, the Allies attacked with overwhelming force in the historic battle of El Alamein. It became the definitive turning point of the war in North Africa. Rommel's operations were severely hampered by supply problems, because air and naval attacks from Malta disrupted the Axis Powers' supply convoys.

The war in North Africa ended with the Germans surrendering to the British Eighth Army in Tunisia

“The advance ground to a halt when it came up against resolute Allied resistance”

Erwin Rommel uses his Horch heavy cross-country Einheits-PKW car as a lookout point. North Africa, some time in 1942.

in the spring of 1943, but by then they were under another commander.

Rommel's reputation was secure. Much to the chagrin of senior Allied commanders, his battlefield skill was universally revered. “Doing a Rommel” even entered British slang, and was used to describe doing something especially clever or unexpected.

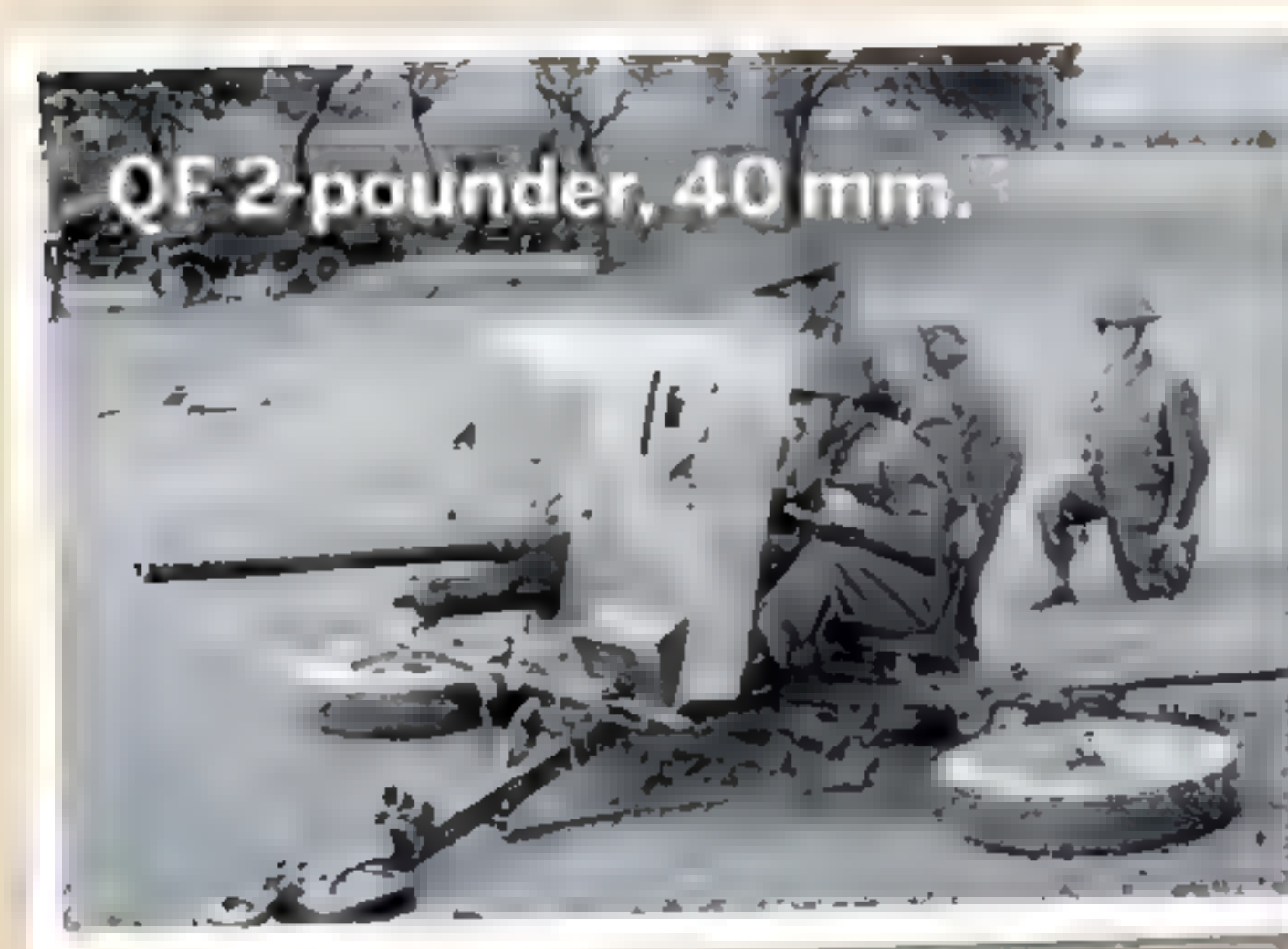
The African campaign was characterised by the fact that the region was nominally under Italian control. And Mussolini insisted that the highest command be exercised by Italians – an inconvenient fact that Rommel ignored whenever possible. In fact, Rommel's attitude towards senior Italian commanders was marked by a contempt that grew into disgust. On the other hand, he felt great ►



CORBIS/GETTY

German anti-tank guns ruled the field

★ Anti-tank defences usually include weapons, terrain alteration and mines, but the following account is limited to the first of those. At this point, Rommel only had access to anti-tank guns – recoilless weapons were introduced a few months later.



British



★ The British were severely handicapped in the summer of 1942 because they were still using the outdated 40-mm QF 2 gun, despite a new 57-mm piece being ready for production. Fearing an invasion of Britain, the top brass didn't want to cease production while they retooled arms factories, so they continued making the QF2. It was not until 1943 that a fully modern anti-tank gun (QF 17 pdr) came into service, but even then it had new, under-calibrated hardcore ammunition. The new guns also required towing and were limited to use on level ground.

German



★ The German Army's active use of anti-tank artillery even in offensive combat was based on effective 50-mm and 76-mm calibre guns, some of which were mounted on tracked chassis. The queen in armoured battles was the classic German 88-mm Flak gun. Originally intended as an anti-aircraft gun, it dominated the North African battlefields when deployed as artillery, with a practical firing range of over two kilometres. Rommel repeatedly arranged 'armoured traps' for the British armoured units by using the Germans' superior anti-tank weaponry.

► sympathy for the Italian rank and file, who had to go to war with substandard equipment and in a strictly hierarchical organisation where officers, NCOs and common soldiers were even given different grades of rations.

Rommel's attack-minded attitude and quick, direct leadership style created great difficulties for the conservatively led Allied forces. Cunning and deception were his common hallmarks, along with rapid reversals of fighting style and changes in troop concentration. When necessary, he was happy to tear up the rulebook – such as splitting his forces if the enemy was weak and disorganised, thereby adding to their confusion.

Under Rommel, the classic tactic of provoking the enemy to make an unplanned attack by feigning a retreat was adapted to have tank units lure their British counterparts into an area filled with concealed anti-tank guns. These made short work of destroying the British tanks. Another form of deception involved the use of lorries disguised as tanks. From a distance, the dust cloud the vehicles created, along with their silhouettes, gave the impression of a large armoured force.

Rommel also had continuous knowledge of both the Eighth Army's position and plans, plus its orders to subordinate units, thanks to a skilled signal intelligence operation and a large slice of luck in the form of a US military attaché in Cairo, who radioed frequent reports on the matter using an encryption method the Germans had already cracked.

Rommel, in common with other German commanders, was unaware that the British also had the ability to intercept and decode German radio messages, which were encrypted using Enigma machines. Thus, virtually all the reports and plans he sent to Berlin and Rome soon landed on the desks of high-level British commanders. However, inertia in the Allied command structure and its handling of such reports meant that it took an age

This German 88-mm Flak 18/37 gun is aiming at a British artillery command vehicle during the battle of Gazala. 18th June 1942.





ULLSTEIN/GETTY

German Afrika Korps troops, who had just arrived in Libya, advance over dunes during the Battle of Brega, where the British were defeated in March 1941.

before this invaluable advantage could be exploited operationally in the field.

It was not just the British military leadership that lacked agility – their tanks and guns were also inferior to those of the Germans. In a combat environment such as the desert, which offered the opportunity for long-range firing and rapid regrouping, the technical characteristics of the weapons became crucial. The Germans' edge in this area was effectively exploited by Rommel.

During Operation Crusader, a major Allied offensive in November 1941, the British Army's numerical advantage coupled with the German forces' ongoing supply problems had put Rommel in a position where only a radical and unexpected manoeuvre could save the situation.

His decision to use most of his armoured forces to make an extensive raid on the British rear was probably his most controversial strategy. The intention was to create such confusion in the Allied lines that his opponents would give up the battle and retreat – all in accordance with the most modern theories of armoured warfare.

In fact, the head of the Allies' land forces in the region was about to do just what Rommel wanted when his superior, the Middle East

“In the ... desert ... the technical characteristics of the weapons became crucial”

commander-in-chief General Claude Auchinleck, replaced him with a new army chief who had unequivocal orders to continue the attacks. As a result, Rommel's raid failed and the Germans were forced to retreat. But if the commanders hadn't been switched, Rommel's attack would probably have succeeded.

Even during the battles of June 1942, Rommel managed to create confusion, bordering on panic, that spread all the way from the commander of the Eighth Army to the Allies' HQ in Cairo. Only the arrival of General Auchinleck himself prevented the Eighth's commander ordering a general retreat.

Rommel used several methods to ensure that he could move quickly during critical combat episodes. At the start of the desert war, the Germans had captured a British staff vehicle, an armoured car ►



Rommel used a captured British vehicle, an AEC Armoured Command Vehicle, as a staff car.

A well-camouflaged Messerschmitt Bf 109E fighter jet sweeps across the Libyan desert. Summer 1941.

From rulers of the air to sitting ducks

During the first years of the desert war, the Axis's forces were well supported by bombers and transport planes that gave Rommel an advantage over the Allies and allowed him to operate without major disruption from British air strikes.

As the Allies strengthened their air forces from summer 1942, this state of affairs changed and life became increasingly difficult for the

Germans. Daytime attacks hampered regrouping operations and destroyed supply vehicles, while medium-sized bombers spread devastation at night.

Rommel's experience in Africa showed him how difficult it was to conduct mobile warfare without air cover. This lack of air strength also affected his plans to defend against an Allied invasion of France in 1944.

▶ with some off-road capability, called the Mammoth. It now became Rommel's mobile headquarters, with space for both staff officers and radio equipment.

At other times, he used an ordinary open car or an armoured half-track vehicle. Perhaps his most dangerous and well-known form of transport around the battlefield was a Fieseler Storch light aircraft. Rommel didn't have a pilot's licence, but he would frequently commandeer the plane, which could take off and land in tight, rough terrain. Rommel sometimes dropped orders from the plane, including one that ordered a slow-moving column of tanks to get a move on or he would be down to see them.

His method of commanding from the front without any significant escort was, of course, especially dangerous on a battlefield without clearly defined front lines, which was shrouded in smoke and dust. On one occasion, Rommel and his staff encountered a field hospital and decided to make a quick inspection. It was only once they were inside that they realised that something was amiss. "I think we'd better get out of this," Rommel whispered to his aide. Saluting the gathered medical staff, he quickly got back into his vehicle and sped off. The hospital had belonged to the Allies.

During most of the desert war, Rommel acted with a great deal of freedom, following or ignoring orders as he saw fit. A special case in point came in October 1942, when he received Hitler's Commando Order. In it, the Führer ordered that any Allied commandos who were taken prisoner were to be shot immediately, even if they were in uniform. Rommel burned the order



Rommel and his Fieseler Fi 156 Storch. The plane's extremely short landing distance was due, in part, to a large wing with a fixed leading-edge slat. The landing gear also had suspension with long travel, which was ideal for rough terrain.

and continued to wage war in accordance with the accepted rules of war and his own sense of honour. This included the correct treatment of prisoners of war, which contributed to the high regard in which he was held by his opponents. Prisoners had a more difficult time when, according to agreement, they were handed over to the Italians.

When Rommel realised during the Battle of El Alamein in November 1942 that the German offensive was doomed without fresh supplies, he began a quick but orderly retreat, fighting a credible rearguard action to slow the Allies' advance as he went. Berlin was apprised of his situation with regular reports, but Hitler was unimpressed and intervened to ban any form of retreat – just as he did with the operations on the Eastern Front. Hitler insisted that there was “no other road than that to victory or death”. Rommel halted his retreat for a

“During most of the desert war, Rommel acted with a great deal of freedom”

day before deciding to ignore the order, something that Hitler subsequently accepted. However, the event shook Rommel's faith in the Führer.

When Rommel returned to Germany in March 1943 for health reasons, he started to hear from colleagues and others about the Nazis' systematic abuse of the Jews, particularly in Poland and on the Eastern Front. Later that year, during a short period as commander of the forces in northern Italy, he ►



Tanks, half-tracks, lorries with artillery pieces and other German vehicles bypass the British Gazala line south of Bir Hakeim on 27th May 1942.

ERWIN ROMMEL

“Rommel worked tirelessly to strengthen the defences on the beaches”

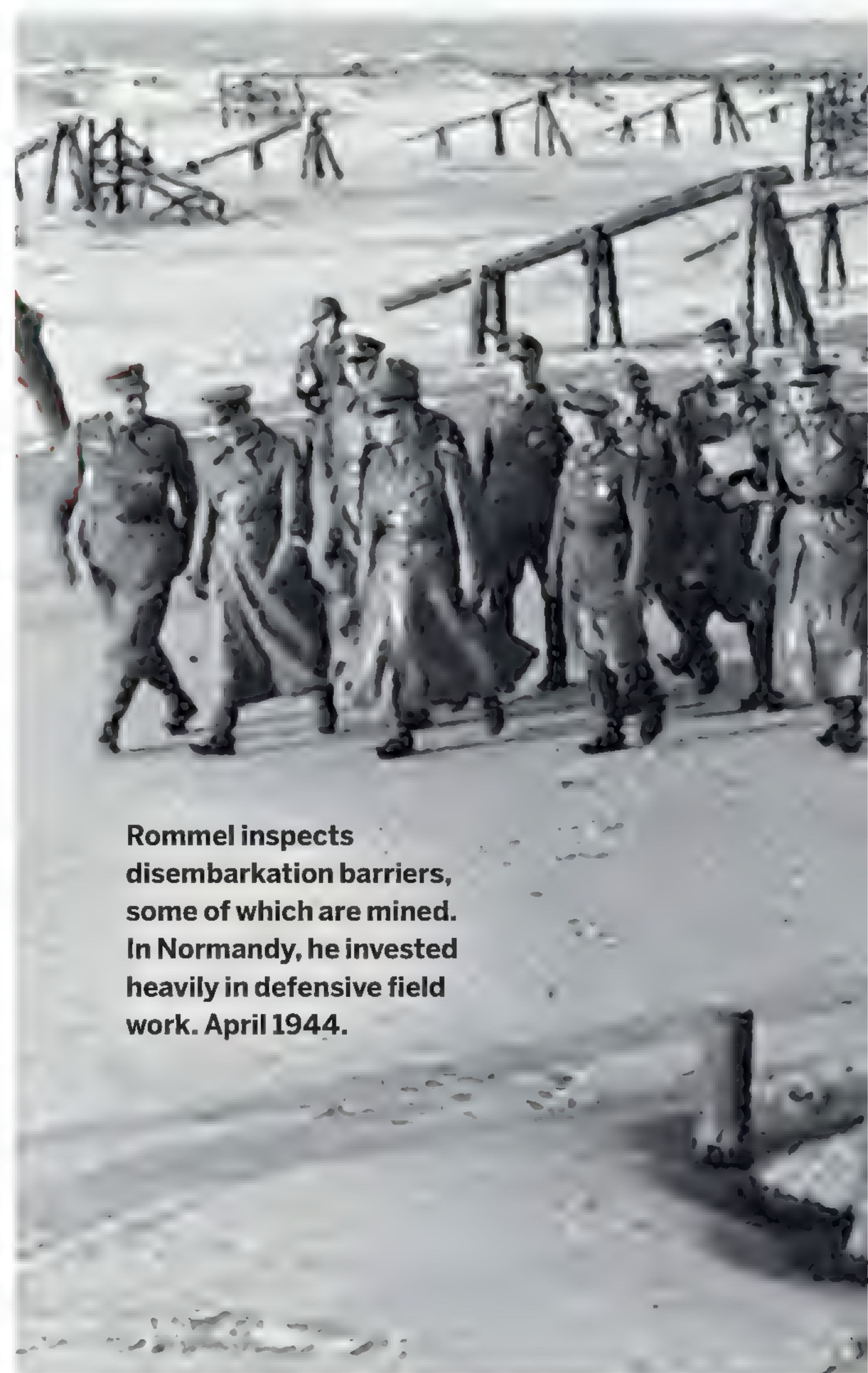
- ▶ personally witnessed the regime’s persecution of the Jews. His attitude to Nazism and even Hitler himself – with whom he tried in vain to raise what he had seen – was strongly influenced by these experiences and his previous unreserved admiration began to sour.

In January 1944, Rommel was appointed commander of Army Group B in charge of the defence of Northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands. His immediate superior was the commander-in-chief in the West, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. Unfortunately for Rommel, the pair had conflicting views about how an invading force should be beaten back. Von Rundstedt believed that German armoured divisions should attack the enemy as they emerged from bridgeheads. But Rommel’s experience of waging war in a theatre where the Allies had air supremacy convinced him that the coordinated concentration and movement of large armoured forces would be impossible under such conditions. Instead, he wanted to gather the defence near the landing area and stop the enemy establishing a foothold on land. He believed that the outcome of the invasion would be decided during the first 24 hours.

The result was an unhappy compromise. During the months leading up to the Allied invasion in June 1944, Rommel worked tirelessly to strengthen the defences on the beaches in the regions of Pas de Calais and Normandy.

When the invasion took place, the countermeasures that should have been deployed

Traces of the Atlantic Wall are still visible today. This 152-mm piece is located in Longues-sur-Mer in Normandy. This battery wasn’t under Rommel’s command; it was manned by the German Navy.



Rommel inspects disembarkation barriers, some of which are mined. In Normandy, he invested heavily in defensive field work. April 1944.

BJNDESARCHIV, BILD1011 719 0243 33/JESSE/CC BY SA 3.0

immediately were delayed, first by the fact that Rommel was away on a trip to Germany, and second because Hitler delayed in making the strategic armoured reserve available. The defence in Normandy was thus handicapped from the beginning and never had the chance to become anything other than a tough but ultimately futile effort to hold back an increasingly strong attacking force who had complete air supremacy.

On 17th July 1944, fate finally caught up with Erwin Rommel. His staff car was fired upon by a Canadian pilot in a Spitfire and careered off the road at high speed. Rommel was thrown clear but suffered three skull fractures among other injuries. Although he survived and recovered surprisingly well over the next few months, his time as a military commander in the field was over.

The question of Rommel’s involvement in a resistance plot against Hitler had two strands: his knowledge of and possible participation in the 20th July





assassination attempt and his own plans to bring about a ceasefire on the Western Front.

From the summer of 1943, he had repeatedly expressed his pessimism about the outcome of the war. He had done this directly to Hitler as well as to military colleagues and civilian friends, some of whom were involved in the insurgency movement's political wing. During the winter of 1944, Rommel had become aware of plans to remove Hitler but neither expressed support for or clearly distanced himself from such thoughts. However, it is unlikely that he was informed that an attempt was to be made to assassinate Hitler – in any case, Rommel never reported the existence of such a plot to the security services. Nor did he report what he had learned about the existence of an insurgency movement. He did share the insurgents' pessimistic view of the war's likely outcome, however, and vowed to continue trying to talk to the Führer about the political consequences of his failing military effort.

No opportunity arose until the last time Hitler and Rommel met, on 16th June 1944, when he and von

Rundstedt offered a gloomy report on the situation in Normandy. Both tried to persuade Hitler to consider a political settlement instead, such as negotiating a separate peace with the Western Allies. Hitler vehemently rejected any suggestion of political bargaining, however and threw Rommel out of his office.

By the spring of 1944, it was no secret among Rommel's inner circle that, given the right conditions, Rommel himself was prepared to meet with representatives from the US and Britain and broker a ceasefire on the Western Front. But this idealistic notion ignored the political reality of the Western Allies' likely response to such an offer, and shows ►

Rommel's maxims

"A bold operation is one in which success is not a certainty but which ... leaves one with sufficient forces ... to cope with whatever situation may arise"

"A gamble can lead either to victory or to ... complete destruction"

ERWIN ROMMEL

► that Rommel shared the illusions and naive hopes that were eventually nurtured by many in Germany.

As a result, although he wasn't involved in planning any active resistance and never conspired in the assassination attempt on Hitler, Rommel was mooted as a possible future Reich chancellor in journals written by some of the true insurgents (albeit without Rommel's knowledge). After the assassination attempt on 20th July 1944, these diaries were discovered, further compromising Rommel's position. Taken together with his naive plans for peace talks and his sins of omission in reporting known insurgents, it was more than enough for the regime to accuse him of treason.

The 20th July attack ushered in a new purge. Those suspected of being involved in the plot, however distantly, were brought before a court and then executed. Rommel's misdemeanours made him a candidate for similar treatment. However, a court case against a highly decorated officer like Rommel, whose reputation had been burnished for years by the Nazis' propaganda machine would inevitably raise awkward questions in all parts of German society. Hitler and his henchmen therefore chose to eliminate Rommel in a way that would leave his legacy and image intact.

On 14th October 1944, he was offered a choice between a humiliating show trial or suicide by cyanide. In the latter case, his family would not be harmed – quite the contrary. Rommel's sense of duty to his loved ones made his choice inevitable. He

Rommel on inspection in Normandy, in 1944, the same year he was forced to take his own life. The soldier closest has an MG 42 machine gun.

“His method of leading the fighting from the front ... has also been heavily criticised”

took his own life the same day and was given a state funeral.


Like most prominent historical figures, Rommel has been the subject of various re-evaluations, which continue to this day. Sensational journalists and writers have tried to promote their own interests by producing works that blacken Rommel's reputation by suggesting that he was jointly responsible for the Nazi regime's many crimes, at least indirectly. In the name of political correctness, local authorities in Germany have also removed any memorials to Rommel.

His method of leading the fighting from the front in France and North Africa has also been heavily criticised, not just because of the undeniable personal risk it involved, but also because it compromised the overall management of operations, which was even worse. However, this was an approach that clearly suited Rommel's tactics and command philosophy. In short, it allowed him to make and enact his decisions in the shortest possible time. As a result, his opponent didn't have chance to deploy countermeasures before the course of the battle rendered them obsolete or even inappropriate.

In modern terminology, this is known as getting inside the opponent's decision cycle, which is made up of four stages: observe, orient, decide and act. Cycling through these stages as quickly as possible gives a tactical advantage because the opponent's thinking and capacity to act is disrupted by the constant need to cycle back to observe, orient and decide. Today's commanders use this strategy in battle, with small teams working in a decentralised chain of command. This is what Rommel was trying to achieve, but without really having a suitable command structure at his disposal, including rapid and reliable transport and communications. To that extent, he was an innovator who quickly received the most sincere form of flattery: imitation.

Erwin Rommel has also been criticised for constantly ignoring the supply realities when planning and performing his bold offensives. Subsequent analysis tends to support this criticism





The dead field marshal was saluted by thousands of Germans as his body was carried through the streets of Ulm in southern Germany, near his home town.

BUNDESARCHIV, BLD183-J30704 CC-BY-SA 3.0

and it is often seen as a consequence of his lack of higher-level training. It must be remembered, however, that Rommel's surprise tactics sometimes relied upon unexpected supply lines – he often expected to use captured stores, for example. Also, he was repeatedly misled by solemn but false promises from his superiors regarding incoming supplies, much of which ended up on the bottom of the Mediterranean, having been sunk by Allied forces stationed on the island of Malta. Critics also disregard his improvisational ability in the management of supplies, such as arranging fuel distribution from landed transport planes directly behind the front.

On a more personal level, it should be noted that Rommel was an excellent writer. His documentation and description of his operations in France and North Africa, complete with sketches, are particularly noteworthy. These records were compiled after the war by the innovative British military thinker BH Liddell Hart, among others, and were published in 1953 under the title *The Rommel Papers*.

What drove Rommel on a personal basis is not easy to fathom, but it seems to have been

partly loyalty to the fatherland, along with a not insignificant measure of personal ambition.

Although his tactical and operational genius is undisputed, Rommel's strategic judgment has been called into question by many observers. On the other hand, authorities such as BH Liddell Hart have analysed and approved it. His way of dealing with his superiors – and even at times his close associates – was often overly brusque and thus counterproductive, but his ability to inspire his soldiers was incredible.

Rommel's most sympathetic traits as a human being were probably the love and care he showed his own family. It is perhaps therefore fitting that he ended his life in order to save those he loved the most. 🇨🇭

Johan Lupander is a writer of military history.


Rommel's operational principles

"Concentrate one's own forces ... while ... seeking to split the enemy forces"

"Protect one's own supply lines ... cut the enemy's"

"Reconnaissance reports must reach the commander in the shortest possible time"

Rommel frequently ignored the top two in his quest for surprise.



**"IT IS AT THE OPERATIONAL
LEVEL, NOT THE TACTICAL
ONE, THAT A GENERAL
CAN INFLUENCE WHAT
IS HAPPENING"**

Albert Kesselring became a field marshal in 1940. He began his career as an artillery officer, but switched to aviation in 1933, when he was made head of the admin department at the Reich Commissariat for Aviation.

An aerial photograph showing a large-scale military operation, likely a parachute drop. Numerous white parachutes are visible against a grey, overcast sky. In the lower portion of the image, the dark silhouettes of buildings and structures are visible, suggesting an urban or industrial setting. The overall tone is somber and historical.

Albert Kesselring

THE LAST WARLORD

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring was a master at coordinating Germany's different armed forces, and he used his skills to maximum effect during World War II. Later, he was given the death penalty, but his sentence was reduced after an appeal by Churchill.

Text: **LARS ERICSON WOLKE** *author of The Last Days of Hitler*



SCHERL/SUEDEDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/RITZAU SCANPIX

As a senior member of the Luftwaffe, Kesselring played a crucial role in the German blitzkrieg or 'lightning war' of 1939-41. Here he is seen striding away from a Junkers Ju 52 transport plane.

For almost a whole year – from September 1943 to June 1944 – Allied troops struggled and fought their way up from the tip of the Italian boot to Rome. Despite a great material superiority, the advance was annoyingly slow and the losses were great. The attempts that were made to speed up the advance usually ended in costly defeats. The story of the Allied invasion of Italy can also be viewed as a highly successful defensive action by German forces. And the man behind it was German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring.

Kesselring is usually considered by most military historians to be one of the few real warlords of World War II. But what does that mean? Is there a place for warlords in modern warfare? After all, compared to the warlords' classic era of the 17th and 18th centuries, World War II was a modern, high-tech affair.

To answer this, it's important to define what distinguishes a warlord from other, 'ordinary'

generals. A skilled commander must have a solid, professional education, as well as extensive personal experience of leading troops in battle at various levels, but that is not all.

FOR NAPOLEON BONAPARTE – in some respects the quintessential warlord – the matter was quite simple. When choosing whom to appoint as a marshal, or other senior officer, he asked just one question: was the person in question willing to take calculated risks? Or as the French emperor put it: "*Est-il heureux?*" ("Is he lucky?")

Regardless of attempts to rationalise what has happened afterwards, in battle, confusion is, to some extent, the normal state of affairs. Despite efforts to create systems that give the commander knowledge of 'real-time' events, few military commanders ever have full control over everything that is happening during a conflict. The balance between confusion on the one hand and control and command on the other can, of course, also vary significantly from

one battle to another, not least because of the level of the forces' training, organisation and equipment.

From that perspective, the manoeuvring necessary to force an opponent into a position from which he compelled to fight under unfavourable circumstances or simply give up, gains extra significance. This is where a key component of the greatness of warlords such as the 1st Duke of Marlborough, Frederick the Great and Napoleon emerges. It is here where military science gives way to something more elegant and elusive: military art.

Perhaps the Russian author Tolstoy came closest to the truth when, in the novel *War and Peace*, he has Napoleon define military art to his adjutant just before the Battle of Borodino. For Tolstoy's emperor it is "the art of being stronger than the enemy at a given moment. That's all."

It is at the operational level, not the tactical one, that a general can influence what is happening, by gaining local superiority. But once battle is joined, either as a result of pressure from the enemy or by choice, it becomes about taking risks, hopefully calculated ones, in order to succeed.

IN MODERN WARFARE, with its increasingly complex military hardware, another factor has emerged in the making of a warlord that was less significant to the likes of Marlborough and Napoleon: having a deep understanding of all the machinery with which a senior military commander can wage war. All commanders have their roots in a certain unit type and branch of the military, where they received their education, and it is here, in their own area of expertise, that they are probably the most skilled. But to succeed at a higher operational level requires great knowledge of and insight into the abilities and limitations of all military branches and the unit types that form them. Only then can a commander achieve the best results by utilising all the forces together to maximum effect.

All this reasoning leads us straight to Albert Kesselring and explains why he achieved the success he did. He was a master of operational matters, at least in part, because he understood what the various unit types and weapons in the German armed forces could and could not do.

Kesselring was born in 1885 in Bayreuth, Bavaria. His family was well established in Bayreuth's middle class – his father was a schoolteacher and city councillor – which meant there were ample opportunities for a civilian career. But Albert Kesselring chose the military path and after graduating in 1904, he ended up as an aspiring officer in the 2nd Bavarian Foot Artillery Regiment. At that time, the unit was stationed at Metz in Lorraine, which had been captured from France in 1871. In Imperial Germany, before 1918, there was

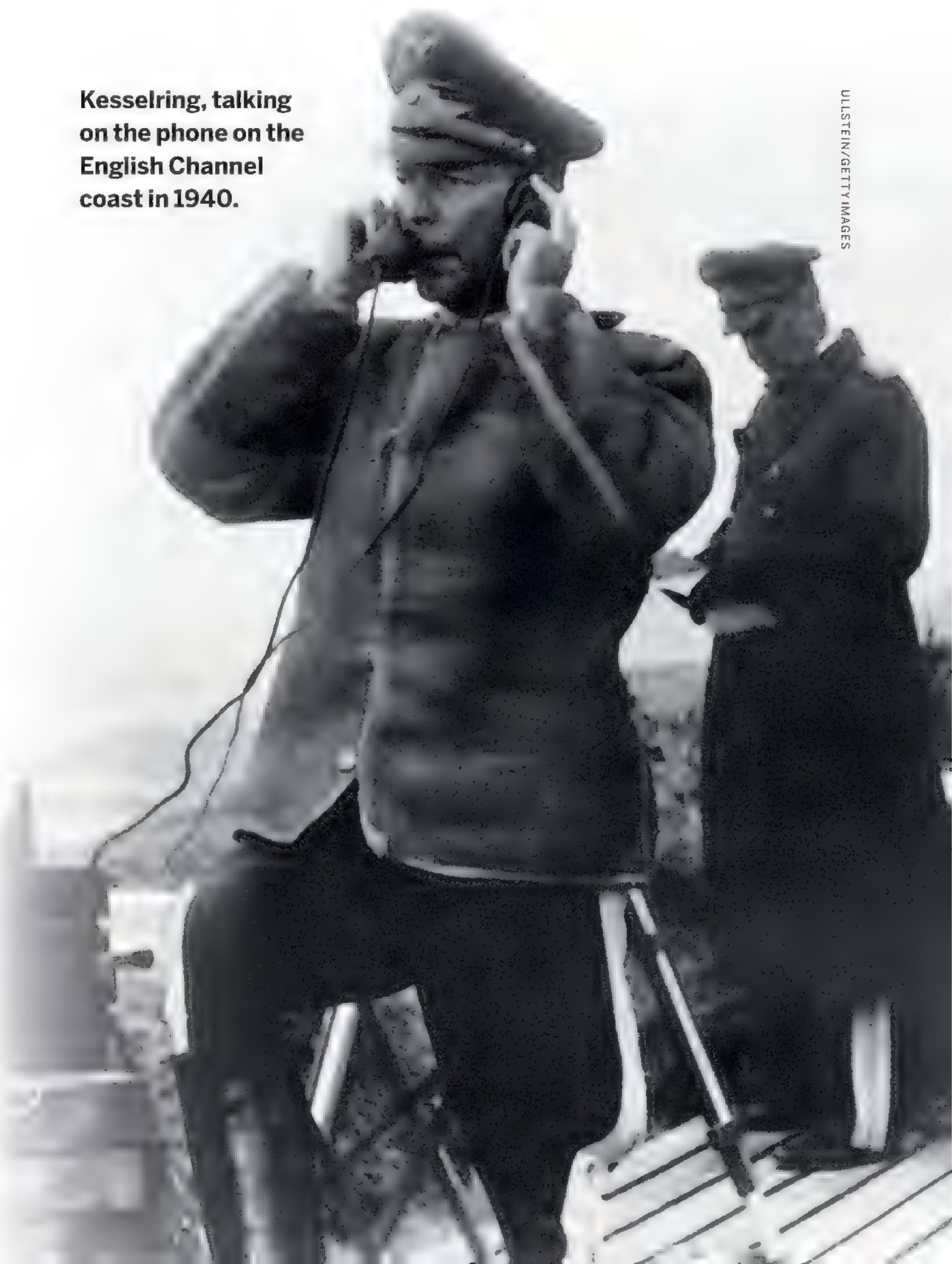
"IT WAS NOT SUCH A BIG STEP FROM GROUND-BASED ARTILLERY TO SHELLING UNITS FROM THE AIR"

no single army. Instead, each region had its own. There was a Prussian one, a Bavarian one, and so on, but all were commanded by the emperor.

However, the most important military schools were shared, and Kesselring went through both the Military Academy and the School of Artillery and Engineering. The military cadets extensively studied the battlefield operations of the Franco-German war of 1870-71, and it was here that Kesselring later claimed he gained his first insights into what was required of an operational commander to master the 'art of manoeuvring'.

During World War I, Kesselring advanced to the regimental staff. Then, in 1917, he came to the notice of senior commanders and was ordered to join the general staff. By November 1918, however, it was all over. Germany was defeated and the

Kesselring, talking on the phone on the English Channel coast in 1940.



ALBERT KESSELRING

► emperor had fled. Anarchy and social unrest prevailed in several parts of the country. It was perhaps worst in Kesselring's home region, Bavaria. A Marxist government had overthrown the Bavarian monarchy and seized power in Munich.

For Kesselring, conservative and authoritarian, this was unthinkable. After the war, he also served on the Eastern Front, demobilising troops there. He was dismayed to see how Russia's Tsarist army had collapsed under the pressure of huge losses and internal political conflicts. Kesselring's experiences of Marxism in Bavaria and Russia meant that he later gravitated towards Hitler and the Nazi Party as a defence against Communism.

In 1922, Kesselring was posted to the training department of the *Reichswehr*, post-war Germany's slimmed-down army, under its chief-of-staff Hans von Seeckt. Here, Kesselring worked to secretly prepare for the rearmament of Germany that senior staff believed would come to pass one day. He began refining the army's organisational model, upgrading it with modern units and weapon systems, and laying the foundation for a new air force.

After a short stint as regimental commander in the artillery, in 1933 Kesselring was ordered to head up the Administration Department of Hermann Göring's Ministry of Aviation.

IN THE EARLY years, Kesselring oversaw the important, but not overly glamorous, work of building the Luftwaffe's infrastructure of bases and facilities. But in 1936, he was promoted to the Luftwaffe's chief-of-staff after the previous incumbent died in a plane crash. And so began his work conducting major operations. During the attack on Poland in September 1939, Kesselring commanded Luftflotte 1, whose aircraft were primarily tasked with tactical strikes against enemy ground units. But he also had some fighter jets and bombers at his disposal.

The one-time artilleryman was given the task of leading air forces in close cooperation with the army. The German blitzkrieg that won such success in 1939-41 was based upon a rapid advance by mechanised units, led by tanks, in close cooperation with tactical air support. Bombers gave the mobile ground units the fire support they had previously



Kesselring was able to sit at the controls of his own service aircraft, a Siebel Fh 104, during his many inspection trips.

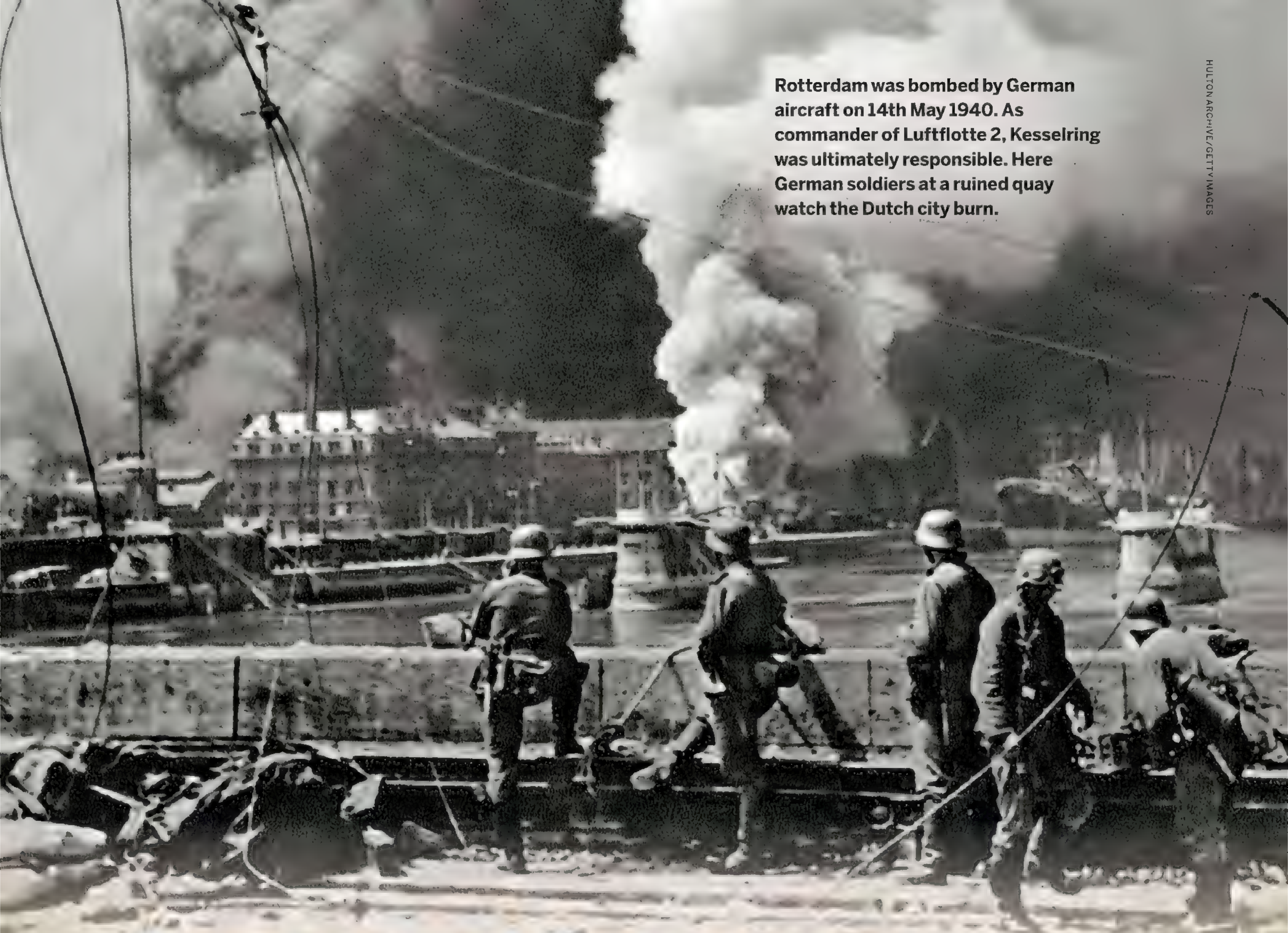
received from the artillery. For the experienced artillery officer Kesselring, it was not such a big step from ground-based artillery to shelling units from the air. He recognised the tactical significance of the bombers. In addition, he learned to fly different planes so that he understood the strengths and limitations of each. It also enabled him to sit at the controls of his own aircraft during inspection trips.

Just before the major push west in May 1940, Kesselring was given command of Luftflotte 2 and ordered to support Colonel von Bock's Army Group B when it invaded Belgium and the Netherlands. His role was to quickly crush the defenders, so that Allied ground units and British aircraft didn't have time to establish themselves and support the Belgian and Dutch defences.

THE GERMAN PLAN was to attack through the wooded Ardennes region and then speed towards the English Channel, driving a wedge between the Allied armies. Therefore, it was essential that the northern flank of the advancing German columns was protected. If the Allies were given the opportunity to build up large forces in the Netherlands and then attack south, the entire invasion plan could collapse, with large sections of the German forces potentially being encircled and annihilated. In other words, for Kesselring and other senior commanders, time was of the essence.

Luftflotte 2 also included General Kurt Student's airborne corps, with a division of paratroopers and an airborne infantry division (which landed with gliders). The airborne troops were dropped at a number of strategic points to secure bridges ►

“HE RECOGNISED THE TACTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BOMBERS”



Rotterdam was bombed by German aircraft on 14th May 1940. As commander of Luftflotte 2, Kesselring was ultimately responsible. Here German soldiers at a ruined quay watch the Dutch city burn.

Bombing of Rotterdam

★ On the 10th May 1940, more than one hundred German paratroopers took control of the Willemsbrug bridge over the Nieuwe Maas river in Rotterdam. But the Dutch defence hardened and, after three days, the German soldiers had not been able to link up with their armoured units further north.

The Germans decided an air strike was the only way to break the deadlock. However, at 14.15 on the 14th May, 45 minutes before the attack was to begin, the German ground commander radioed the Luftwaffe command post to postpone the air strike because the Dutch had signalled their intent to surrender. However, the message came too late: 90 Heinkel 111 bombers were already on their way to Rotterdam.

SEVERAL FAILED attempts were made to abort the planned strike. Both the paratroopers inside Rotterdam

and the German 9th Panzer Division outside the city fired red flares, but haze and smoke obscured the city and the pilots saw nothing but a squadron from the Dutch air force. One force flew in from the south and another from the east.

It was only after the bombs started to fall that one of the German pilots saw the red flares. Planes in later waves were contacted by radio and managed to abort their runs, but around half of the German bombers had already dropped their deadly payloads over Rotterdam.

TO ADD to the Dutch city's misfortune, the German bombers hit a margarine storage facility that caught fire, and the flames spread quickly through central parts of the city. As a result, and despite the fact that the German planes only used explosive bombs and not firebombs, Rotterdam was engulfed by firestorms that the city's fire brigade had no chance

of fighting. Around one thousand people died and 78,000 Rotterdam residents suddenly became homeless.

The head of the operational department of the Luftwaffe's command staff, General von Waldau, described how the attack "transformed South Rotterdam into a heap of rubble".

THE TERRORIST carpet bombing inflicted on Rotterdam on the 14th May 1940 horrified the world. Germany was almost universally condemned on the international stage, not least by the United States. In the uproar, it would have been pointless to try to explain that the Rotterdam bombing was a tactical precision strike that had gone completely awry. Ultimate responsibility for the disaster lay with Luftflotte 2's commander, Albert Kesselring, who later unsuccessfully claimed that he had acted in full accordance with international law.

ALBERT KESSELRING

► and airfields before German ground units arrived. Kesselring was very active in planning how his own and von Bock's troops would combine.

The attack began on 10th May 1940, when a series of air landings was made, including in the Netherlands. In several places, the attackers met stiff Dutch resistance and several airfields were never captured as a result. However, on the whole, the attack went according to plan.

But then the German troops arrived in Rotterdam and ran into serious trouble. Kesselring's bombers flattened the south side of the city to clear their path. Dutch resistance was broken, but accusations of deliberate terrorist bombing of civilians were levelled at Kesselring. The day after the air strike, on 15th May, the Dutch army surrendered.

DURING THE SUMMER of 1940, Kesselring's air fleet was given two impossible tasks. First, he was tasked with crushing the British troops that were pushed up against the Channel coast at Dunkirk using air power alone, but without active attacks from German ground units, the offensive failed and most of the British soldiers were evacuated. Second, he had to prepare for the planned invasion of Britain, initially by trying to grind down the RAF

during the Battle of Britain, then by carpet bombing British cities in the Blitz. Kesselring failed on both counts, blaming a lack of heavier, strategic bombers for the outcome. He was partly right in this, but it didn't account for why his pilots had been defeated by the RAF's Spitfires and Hurricanes.

More difficult still was Kesselring's next task: the invasion of the Soviet Union. On 22nd June 1941, the German invasion began and Kesselring's Luftflotte 2 again supported von Bock's ground forces, now in the form of Army Group Centre, which rolled towards Smolensk and Moscow. Despite exceptional success both in the air and on the ground, the German attack was halted before the gates of Moscow in December 1941. Three-and-a-half years of bloody struggle then ensued until the Russians stood in Berlin. But before the turning point came, Kesselring had moved again – he was now in much warmer latitudes.

In the spring of 1941, German units under Erwin Rommel had been deployed in the Libyan desert to support the Italians, who were losing their battle against the British Eighth Army. In December 1941, Kesselring was appointed Wehrmacht Commander-in-Chief South, responsible for ground, naval and air forces in the region. But the reality of being a

German soldiers near Smolensk on the Eastern Front. This photo was taken on 13th July 1941.



"KESSELRING WAS FAR LESS ADEPT AT READING THE POLITICAL GAME"

German commander in North Africa was far more complicated than the title suggested. The highest operational command of all Italian and German troops in the region was actually exercised by the Italian Supreme Command, under its chief-of-staff General Ugo Cavallero, while the German-Italian force in Libya under Rommel was officially subordinate to the Italian army chief General Bastico, who in turn took orders from Cavallero. Kesselring, meanwhile, lacked an integrated German-Italian staff; he only had access to the Luftflotte 2's staff that he brought with him when he left the Russian front, so they had to double up as the staff for both organisations for a while.

The contrast with the well-integrated US-British staff that General Eisenhower was provided with when he became the senior Allied commander in Europe in 1942 was stark.

ADMITTEDLY, WITH A winning manner and a good dose of psychological insight, Kesselring succeeded in establishing good relations with both Cavallero and his political master, the dictator Mussolini. But it didn't help his cause when Rommel bypassed the Italian command structure and communicated instead with the Wehrmacht's High Command (OKW) or Hitler himself.

Rommel had the Führer's ear in a way that Kesselring would never have, and he made full use of it. The result was that Rommel, with Hitler's blessing, dictated offensive and defensive operations in the North African desert, leaving Kesselring to solve the huge logistical problems that suddenly arose when Rommel's armoured units sped off east towards the Egyptian border.

The task of supplying Rommel's Afrika Korps was severely hampered by the fact that Malta was still under British control. Kesselring dismissed the idea of crushing the island's defence with air power alone and tried instead to persuade Hitler to sanction a landing. The Führer refused and so Malta remained a potent threat to Axis supplies. In November 1942, a well-supplied Lieutenant-General Montgomery won the Battle of El Alamein and US units landed in French North Africa.

Six months later, North Africa was lost and a quarter of a million German and Italian soldiers had been taken prisoners of war. Kesselring later claimed that a more thoughtful defence could have saved the Axis powers' positions, but he may well have been speaking against his own better



judgement, driven by spite and a desire to take revenge on Rommel.

Kesselring's attention now shifted to Sicily. On 10th July 1943, Allied troops landed on the island and Kesselring immediately decided not to be drawn into an impossible battle. Protected by a strong line of defence around Messina, he evacuated up to 80,000 German and Italian soldiers, who successfully took their heavy equipment to the Italian mainland, making the Axis's equivalent of Dunkirk far more successful than the original British version three years earlier. Kesselring focused on continuing the fight for Italy.

IF HE WAS a skilled commander-in-chief, Kesselring was far less adept at reading the political game. He was therefore caught off guard when Marshal Badoglio and some co-conspirators overthrew Mussolini on 25th July 1943. On 9th September, Montgomery's Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina and landed in Calabria, while Clark's US Fifth Army landed in the Gulf of Salerno with a view to marching on Naples.

Kesselring was unable to repel the invaders and, towards the turn of the year, was forced to retreat to prepared positions along the Gustav Line that ran from the mouth of the River Sangro on the ►

Albert Kesselring (left) with Erwin Rommel (right) in North Africa, on 3rd September 1942.

ALBERT KESSELRING



The Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943. The Germans were gradually pushed further and further north on the Italian mainland. However, the Allied advance was slow and the resistance fierce.



Kesselring led the German troops during the Allied Invasion of Italy 1943–44. But his defensive line was broken at Monte Cassino.

- Adriatic Coast across a series of mountain peaks, including the hilltop abbey Monte Cassino, to the mouth of the River Garigliano that flows out into the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Despite the setbacks – Italy switched sides during September 1943, after which major Italian units were disarmed by their former German comrades-in-arms – Kesselring claimed that he had been extremely close to victory. If only Hitler, and his old adversary Rommel, who commanded northern Italy, had given him the necessary reinforcements, his 10th Army would have driven the Americans at Salerno back into the sea. Instead, the Luftwaffe suffered irreplaceable losses at Salerno.

THE GUSTAV LINE became the cornerstone of Kesselring's defence of Italy. It succeeded beyond expectations, but in the spring of 1944 the situation became increasingly difficult. Allied troops landed in Anzio, behind the Gustav Line, and after extremely costly attacks, the Allies broke through, but not before the medieval monastery of Monte Cassino with its cultural treasures was pulverised by aerial bombs and artillery fire. On 4th June,

Kesselring withdrew his troops from Rome without a fight and regrouped at the Gothic Line that ran along the northern Apennine Mountains.

The German defence was tenacious and responsive. Despite heavy losses, the units were able to transform into new battle groups and continue an effective defensive battle. At the same time, a lack of flexibility and difficult personal conflicts between the Allies' top commanders meant that almost all Allied attacks became unimaginative and costly.

His own professionalism paired with his opponents' weaknesses allowed Kesselring to wage a tough and effective defensive battle in southern Italy, while the Allied troops had to crawl north metre by metre, despite their numerical and material superiority. Ensuring he maintained a high degree of mobility, sufficient reserves and the ability to improvise were the cornerstones of Kesselring's operational art. The result was that the Allied invasion of Italy became a textbook definition of ineffective warfare.

But then, on 6th June 1944, the Allies landed in Normandy. All available units were now sent west to assist Rommel's defence of the Channel coast. In

"ALBERT KESSELRING WAS, WITHOUT DOUBT, ONE OF THE MOST SKILLED OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS OF WORLD WAR II"

Italy, Kesselring had to make do with what he had, increasingly pressured by the Allied forces and with reinvigorated Italian partisans at his back. In the autumn of 1944, however, Kesselring's troops were still blocking the Allied advance.

On 23rd October 1944, Kesselring's car smashed into a towed artillery piece and he suffered severe head injuries, but against all odds, he recovered and rejoined his men in Italy in March 1945. The situation was deteriorating, but Kesselring didn't have to think about the problems there for long. Almost immediately, Hitler appointed him Commander-in-Chief West. Kesselring was told that new weapons and fresh troops – including a new 12th Army – were all on their way, and he could use these resources to win the battle in the west.

However, these were all just hopeless fantasies on Hitler's part. Morale disintegration spread rapidly within the increasingly inferior German troops, and Kesselring spent much of his time organising the capture of deserters and preventing total disintegration. In April, he was given command of the defence of southern Germany, northern Italy, Yugoslavia and the south-eastern front against the Russians. It was possibly an even more unachievable task, but it didn't last long; in May 1945, it became his task to offer Germany's surrender to the Allies.

ALBERT KESSELRING WAS, without doubt, one of the most skilled operational commanders of World War II, with a deep understanding of how different troop types and weapon systems could work together to maximum effect. But he was also tainted by having served a criminal regime.

In 1947, Kesselring was brought before a British war crimes tribunal in Venice for the murder of 335 Italians in March 1944 in the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome. The killings were a reprisal for the deaths of 33 men from Police Regiment Bozen, a military unit formed of mostly ethnic Germans, in Rome the day before. At the trial, Kesselring's defence stressed the fact that the retaliation order came from Hitler personally and was carried out by the SS and Gestapo leaderships in Rome. In addition, it pointed out that the partisans themselves had acted contrary to the rules of war.

Despite these arguments, Kesselring was sentenced to death and only an appeal from Winston



Churchill to Clement Attlee, who had succeeded him as prime minister, was able to see the sentence commuted to life imprisonment.

Kesselring was locked up in a prison in Werl, Germany, where he spent time writing his memoirs. In 1952, he was pardoned for medical reasons after he was diagnosed with throat cancer.

Eight years later, a few months before his 75th birthday, Albert Kesselring died – one of the last warlords in military history. ★

Lars Ericson Wolke is a professor of military history at the Swedish National Defence College in Stockholm.

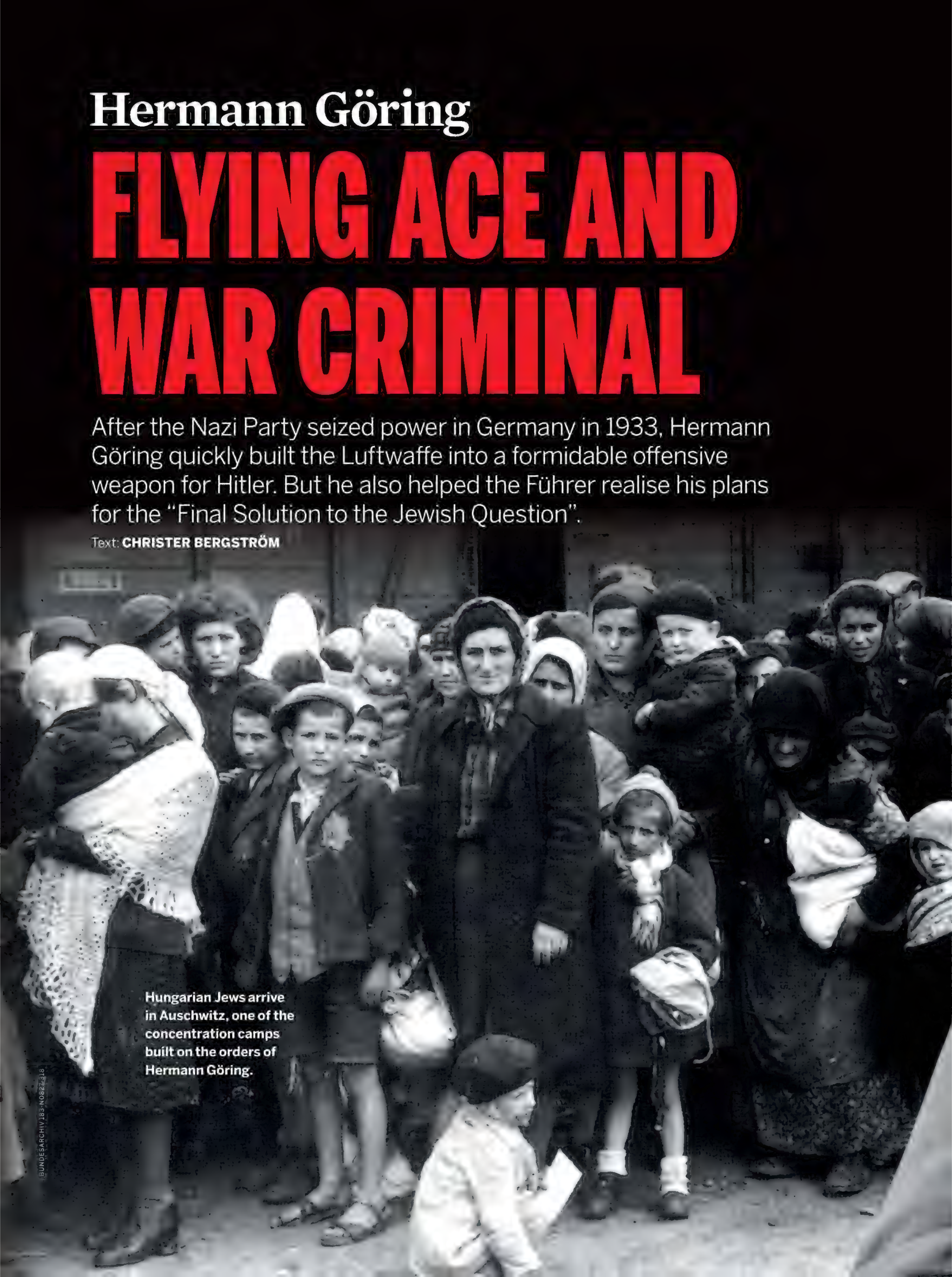
Kesselring (wearing glasses) with staff on the Ligurian coast of northern Italy in October 1944.

Hermann Göring

FLYING ACE AND WAR CRIMINAL

After the Nazi Party seized power in Germany in 1933, Hermann Göring quickly built the Luftwaffe into a formidable offensive weapon for Hitler. But he also helped the Führer realise his plans for the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question".

Text: **CHRISTER BERGSTRÖM**



Hungarian Jews arrive
in Auschwitz, one of the
concentration camps
built on the orders of
Hermann Göring.

Göring headed up the German air force, the Luftwaffe, and was one of Hitler's closest associates.



HERMANN GÖRING

Lützow, I'll have you shot!" exclaimed Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring, frothing with rage after being criticised by Günther Lützow, one of Nazi Germany's best fighter pilots.

They were meeting in early January 1945, during a period of crisis in which they could both foresee the total collapse of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich within a few months. Nowhere was the crisis greater than within the Luftwaffe, whose fighter jets had completely failed to defend German cities and industry against the Allies' devastating bombing raids.

Lützow was the spokesperson for a group of high-ranking fighter pilots who'd requested a meeting with Hermann Göring to present their criticism. The tipping point had been Göring's dismissal of the *General der Jagdflieger* (inspector of fighters), the famous Lieutenant General Adolf Galland, one of the country's greatest pilots. Göring turned again to Lützow, shouting that it was a "mutiny without parallel in history".

Neither Göring nor any other of the Nazi Party leaders welcomed criticism from their subordinates, least of all in a difficult situation like this.

How different everything had been when Hermann Göring himself was a young, famous

fighter pilot in World War I. It was a time to which he constantly yearned to return.

Born in 1893, Göring had grown up in the medieval Veldenstein Castle, bought for his parents by Hermann's godfather, Hermann Epenstein. Life in the castle fired the young Göring's imagination and inspired him to choose a military career. He fought enthusiastically in World War I in 1914, but was soon hampered by rheumatism in both knees. So, he joined the air force instead.

Göring soon proved to be talented as both a fighter pilot and a commander. In the spring of 1917, he was commissioned to take command of the demoralised Jasta 27 fighter squadron. Its pilots had recently had nothing but setbacks. Göring managed to reverse this trend through his own personal example. Within a few months of becoming commander, the unit had shot down 35 enemy aircraft – Göring personally accounted for 16 of them. In 1918, he was awarded the highest medal for bravery, *Pour le Mérite*, commonly known as the "Blue Max", and took command of the squadron that Manfred von Richthofen – 'The Red Baron' – had led before his death.

After World War I, Göring began working in civil aviation. At the end of 1919, he got a job as a pilot at the newly formed Swedish Air Transport Company and settled in Stockholm.

The young captain alternated commercial flights with private charters. On one of the latter, in

Hermann Göring (back seat) with his friend Bruno Loerzer (front seat) in a reconnaissance aircraft, the Aviatik BI 1914. It was Loerzer who convinced Göring to join the air force.

BUNDESARCHIV 146-2006-0126



**Günther
Lützow**

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY



Hatred and intrigue in the Nazis' top echelons

★ Hermann Göring was deeply involved in the intrigue that existed between the high-ranking Nazis closest to Hitler, which was mainly caused by the dictator's tactic of divide and conquer. Among other things, Göring was involved in planning the assassination of SA leader Ernst Röhm during "The Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, he outmanoeuvred Commander-in-Chief

von Blomberg by defaming him for immoral living, and he waged a veritable war against the Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels and Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. But none was a more dangerous opponent than Hitler's personal secretary, Martin Bormann. There was a mutual hatred

between Bormann and Göring, which ended during the last days of the war with Bormann managing to get Göring sentenced to death in his absence.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES, US

February 1920, he flew the wealthy nobleman Eric von Rosen from Stockholm to his estate, Rockelstad, near Flen, in Sweden. Göring was invited to stay overnight, and there the German pilot made a life-changing acquaintance: von Rosen's 31-year-old sister-in-law, Carin von Kantzow. Although married with a son, von Kantzow fell instantly in love with the German aviator, and began a scandal-ridden relationship with him.

At this point, Göring was living in Stockholm, but in the summer of 1920, he and von Kantzow moved to Munich, where they married in February 1923 following her divorce. It was then that Göring joined the Nazi Party – a movement that had won supporters from among the many Germans who felt betrayed about how World War I had ended.

Carin was suffering from heart disease and in order for her to receive care, they returned to Stockholm in August 1923. Shortly afterwards, Göring temporarily travelled to Munich to take part in the Nazis' failed coup attempt, the Beer Hall Putsch, on 9th November 1923. But it didn't go as the Nazis had intended – at least, not at first. The coup was crushed, Hitler was imprisoned, and Göring narrowly escaped with a gunshot wound to the groin. It was while being treated for the injury in an Austrian hospital that he developed an addiction to morphine.

In March 1925, Hermann and Carin settled at 23 Odengatan, Stockholm. In late summer 1925, he was admitted to hospital for detox and eventually ended up at Långbro mental hospital, which treated people for addiction. Göring was discharged a few months later in October 1925, having freed himself from his dependency, and took up work as a representative for the German Heinecke parachute company in Sweden.

When the German government issued an amnesty for participants of the Nazis' attempted

“GÖRING SOON PROVED TO BE TALENTED AS BOTH A FIGHTER PILOT AND COMMANDER”

coup in 1927, Göring returned to Germany and went into politics full time. In the 1928 election, he entered the Reichstag, representing the Nazi Party. The darkest day in Göring's life came on 17th October 1931, when his beloved Carin died of a heart attack. It was something he would never recover from and it seems to have affected his character, making him even more embittered.

Despite being a member of the hitherto controversial Nazi Party, he was appointed Speaker of the Reichstag in 1932. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, Göring became Commissioner for Aviation and Minister of the Interior in the Free State of Prussia, the dominant territory in the new Weimar Republic. He also took advantage of his privileged position by having a hunting estate built, which he named Carinhall, after his late wife.

As well as being Hitler's deputy and head of Germany's economic four-year plan, Göring came to play a key role in the Nazis' persecution of Jews, Roma, socialists and other groups as the founder of the secret Gestapo police, which he transferred to Heinrich Himmler in 1934. He also maintained good relations with people in Sweden, especially among the upper class. In 1938, he was made an honorary member of the Swedish Hunters Association, and in 1939, King Gustaf V – a Nazi Germany sympathiser – awarded him the Swedish Royal Order of the ►



Carin von
Kantzow
divorced to
be able to live
with Hermann
Göring.

HERMANN GÖRING

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Messerschmitt Bf 110 at an airfield, equipped with radar on the nose for night flights.



- Sword's Grand Cross. It is worth noting that this was after the introduction of the racial laws in 1935 and the *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) pogrom in 1938, and when the existence of Nazi concentration camps was common knowledge.

The new air force, the Luftwaffe, was Göring's personal creation. As its commander, he was one of the 20th century's great innovators. He was behind most of the Luftwaffe's revolutionary new methods, organisation and equipment. He didn't personally come up with it all, but he was a very responsive manager, with a fantastic ability to see the potential of new ideas.

Without Göring, there wouldn't have been a German blitzkrieg – the tactic that gave Germany its astonishing victories against what were often far stronger opponents in 1939-41.

Thanks to his insights, the concept of blitzkrieg was developed, where Stuka bombers acted as flying artillery to clear the way for rapidly advancing tanks. Wherever they encountered serious resistance, it was shattered by swarms of bombers, guided by radio from the front line. Göring was credited with both the integration of bombers into the air force and the revolutionary co-operation between air and ground forces.

Hermann Göring also acquired the twin-engine Messerschmitt 110, the world's first truly long-range fighter aircraft, for the Luftwaffe. It became the most successful fighter plane during the first few years of the war. It was only when the United States copied the idea with its Mustang

fighter jets in 1944 that the German plane was finally bested.

Göring was blamed for Germany's defeat in the Battle of Britain in 1940, when the Luftwaffe tried to wipe out Britain's fighter jets, but the main reason the British succeeded was that in September 1940, the Luftwaffe began bombing London instead of continuing its successful attacks on Royal Air Force air bases.

Documents show that it was Hitler and several of his generals who pushed for the bombings to be directed at London, while Göring protested, because it would mean an end to the attacks on the bases.

Göring was also accused of making unrealistic promises that his transport aircraft could supply the besieged German army in Stalingrad during the winter of 1942-43. But Göring had actually built up a large, efficient fleet of transport aircraft. The hundreds of planes available at Stalingrad at the end of 1942 were more than enough to supply the surrounded army, but the fact is that the pilots preferred to fly in bad weather, which allowed them to hide from the enemy.

The reason why the airlift to Stalingrad failed was that the pilots refused to fly for fear of Soviet fighter jets. When Göring sent his representative to the area in January 1943, the supply flights gained momentum – but, by then, it was too late.

Almost throughout World War II, the Royal Air Force carried out night-time bombing raids on German cities, but this resulted in terrible losses for the British. Between 1941 and 1944, 7,200 British bombers were lost, which meant that the entire fleet of planes was effectively wiped out and replaced eight times during that period. The main reason was that Göring had built up the world's first organised force of night fighters early on in the war – and with great foresight; 70 percent of the British bomber losses were caused by those German interceptors.

While he was a brilliant and, for a long time, very popular air force commander, Göring was also a totally unscrupulous key figure in the Nazi terror system. This is particularly evident in the vicious Hunger Plan, which he developed as head of the economic four-year plan for the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. When Göring presented it to the Wehrmacht's generals on 2nd May 1941, he said: "As a result, many tens of millions of people will doubtlessly starve."

During a conference, Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, noted Göring's attitude: "The fate of the large cities, especially Leningrad, is of absolutely no importance. This war will

Text continues on page 40 ►

"WITHOUT GÖRING, THERE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN A GERMAN BLITZKRIEG"

A squadron of Junkers
Ju 87 Stuka bombers
going up against the
Allies in North Africa,
in 1941.



HERMANN GÖRING



ULSTEIN/GETTY



Göring during a visit to the Jagdgeschwader 2 (JG 2) 'Richthofen' fighter wing, stationed on the English Channel in 1940. To the right of Göring is the pilot Helmut Wick – the youngest in the Luftwaffe to be appointed wing commander. Wick was shot down in the Channel at the end of November 1940, with 56 confirmed air victories.

HERMANN GÖRING

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY



Dr Sigmund Rascher, on the right, performs cooling experiments for the Luftwaffe in Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

Ordered experiments on prisoners of war

★ One of many experiments carried out with Hermann Göring's knowledge sought to examine the physical effects of high altitude, low pressure, cooling and freezing on humans, using concentration camp prisoners as test subjects, all of whom died as a result.

During the trial of Luftwaffe doctor Sigmund Rascher in Nuremberg in 1946-47, former prisoner Walter Neff testified about such an experiment in which two Soviet prisoners of war managed to survive for several hours in icy water. After three hours, one Soviet said to the other, "Comrade, tell the officer that he may shoot us," but was told that no mercy could be expected from the "Fascist dog". They shook hands and said "Goodbye, comrade."

It took five hours for both prisoners of war to die from the cold.

- ▶ witness the greatest starvation since the Thirty Years' War."

Of course, it's impossible to determine exactly how many in the Soviet Union succumbed to starvation as a result of the Nazi occupation, but the number is in the millions. During the first two years, the Germans plundered enough food for 21.3 million people from the occupied parts of the federation. Nazi policy led to 20 to 40 million deaths there. According to recent German research, seven million of them died from the Nazi-caused famine alone.

In addition to these tens of millions of deaths, Göring bore personal responsibility for the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of six million Jews. As early as July 1941, he ordered Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Nazi security service, to prepare a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question". Even in his position as air force commander, Göring committed war crimes. Among other things, he was responsible for horrific human experiments on Soviet prisoners of war in the Birkenau, Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps.

Remarkably, in the midst of all this, Göring retained a 'human' side. He had a cheerful sense of humour and encouraged the many jokes about him that spread throughout Germany. Apart from

Hitler, no Nazi leader came close to the popularity that Göring enjoyed.

He was also surprisingly lenient towards subordinates who made mistakes. Although entire units could be found guilty of cowardice in the face of the enemy, Göring was reluctant to impose penalties on his pilots. He sometimes threatened to court martial them, but very rarely did so.

From 1943, the Luftwaffe lost more and more of its advantage. When the US deployed its air force in Europe that year, the Allies' air superiority grew rapidly. In combat against large formations of the American B17 bomber, also known as the Flying Fortress – which was equipped with heavy machine guns – the Luftwaffe suffered heavy losses. Although the Germans still shot down more planes than they lost, it was a war of attrition that they couldn't hope to win, because the Allies simply had more planes and pilots than they did.

The inability to defend Berlin from bombing raids became Göring's downfall. His previous popularity among civilians and pilots, as well as with Hitler, plummeted. During the meeting with the mutinous pilots in January 1945, when he threatened them with execution, it was clear to Göring how isolated he was.

Characteristically, Göring didn't carry out his threats against the 'rebels'. All of the fighter pilots



Eight of the accused in Nuremberg. Front row from left: Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Wilhelm Keitel. Back row from left: Karl Dönitz, Erich Raeder, Baldur von Schirach and Fritz Sauckel.

involved, with the exception of Lützow, were allowed to return to their units and kept their posts. The only thing that happened to Lützow was that he was relocated from Germany to Italy, where he was appointed commander of fighter operations in the region.

But for Göring, it was all over. He reportedly repeated a popular German saying to one of the rebel pilots: “Enjoy the war, peace will be terrible.”

In April 1945, when Hitler was isolated in a Berlin that was surrounded by the Red Army, Göring tried to seize power, after which Hitler ordered that he be removed from all his posts

and arrested. When Göring was captured by the Allies, he experienced the spotlight one last time. During the Nuremberg trials of war criminals, he demonstrated a dazzling aptitude for argument, but it couldn’t save him. The court’s judgment summed up Hermann Göring’s malevolence as a Nazi quite well: “His guilt is unique in its enormity.”

On 15 October 1946, while in prison awaiting execution by hanging, he took own his life by swallowing a cyanide capsule. ★

Christer Bergström is a military history writer.

The rebellious fighter pilots

★ Among the German fighter pilot commanders who took part in the mutinous meeting in January 1945 were some of the most prominent pilots of World War II. The most famous was Lieutenant

Colonel Hermann Graf, who was the first to shoot down 200 enemy planes. Then there was Günther Lützow, who scored 108 air victories, while Colonel Gustav Rödel achieved 98. Colonel Eduard Neumann

led the unit in which Hans-Joachim Marseille served – the ace who shot down 17 British fighter jets in one day. Colonel Hannes Trautloft, General Adolf Galland’s right-hand man was also present.



HISTORIE ARKIV

Erich von Manstein

The loyal general

Erich von Manstein followed Prussian officer ideals faithfully throughout World War II. The fact his commander was Adolf Hitler did not matter to the talented general who claimed he never witnessed any war crimes.

Text: **ANDERS FAGER**





Erich von Manstein commanding the 11th Army in Crimea. The battles on the peninsula are one of the three pillars on which his fame rests. His capture of Sevastopol in July 1942 saw him promoted to field marshal.

ERICH VON MANSTEIN

When Fritz Erich Georg Eduard von Lewinski was born on 24th November 1887, his mother allowed him to be adopted by her childless sister Hedwig von Manstein. This probably had little impact on Erich's early life. Both sisters were married to generals and firmly rooted in Prussian aristocratic tradition. Erich's youth in Berlin held no surprises: he was an Imperial court page, spent six years in the cadet corps and joined the 3rd Footguards at the age of nineteen.

Manstein had a good head for study, and in 1913 was sent to the *Kriegsakademie* (War Academy), a stepping stone to the army general staff. But World War I broke out before he completed the course. Manstein was sent into the field but was wounded and spent six months in hospital. In the summer of 1915, he was released and served the rest of the war as a staff officer. Captain Manstein was involved in the planning of almost all the major operations of the war and was considered extremely capable.

After the war, Manstein helped reorganise the new Reichswehr and in 1920 met Miss Jutta Sibylle von Loesch whose pedigree was as solid as his own. The otherwise dispassionate Manstein proposed three days later. The couple had three children.

Manstein was promoted to major. He witnessed Hitler take control and start building up the German armed forces. There was plenty of work for the talented officer who asked no questions so

“INTRIGUES AMONG THE GENERAL STAFF MADE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR MANSTEIN.”

long as Hitler restored Germany's honour. Like all other Germans active under Nazism, von Manstein has been variably tagged as anti-Semitic, not anti-Semitic and even, to some degree, a Jew and Slav, based on the fact that the von Lewinskis had deep roots in the Polish-Silesian soil.

Colonel Manstein was involved in the planning of all German operations in the 1930s, but intrigues among the general staff made life difficult for Manstein, who while both talented and ambitious, had a hard time keeping quiet. He was a member of Chief of Staff Ludwig Beck's clique and succeeded in becoming major general and deputy chief of staff before Beck was fired and Manstein found himself promoted again, this time to lieutenant general with command of an infantry division far from Berlin.

The blind obedience built into the German military system meant no one asked questions when preparations for an attack on Poland began in May 1939. Manstein later claimed that he was uncertain about the operation, but as chief of staff in Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South, he drew up the plan for Poland's downfall. In August, he attended a meeting in which Hitler spoke about how Poland would be wiped out as a nation. Like many other canny German officers, Manstein suffered 'memory lapses' when asked about these meetings after the war. According to him, he did not understand the extent of the "extermination" even when the war was going on.

Poland was invaded on 1st September 1939. Manstein's plan ensured the Poles had no chance of victory; it was only a matter of time before they were forced to surrender. In his memoirs, he talked with respect of the enemy's "great gallantry" but had no recollection of witnessing the SS clear out Jews and other 'undesirables' from behind the front.

At the end of October, Rundstedt's staff moved to Koblenz, where it took command of the newly formed Army Group A. Hitler wanted France to be dealt with as soon as possible, but bad weather and hesitant generals put a stop to it. The plan for the invasion of France was – in principle – a repeat of that in World War I, and Manstein believed it substandard. He began working on alternatives and in early November presented the first draft of what would become known as the Manstein Plan, perhaps the greatest ►



Erich von Manstein in 1938, shortly before being promoted to lieutenant general.

Nazi attack plans in the west

★ Chief of Staff Franz Halder's **original plan** for the attack on France was rejected because it wasn't decisive enough and bore too much resemblance to the approach

adopted in World War I. The **revised plan** met the same fate because Hitler wanted to shift focus south toward Sedan. At the same time, Manstein was working

on his own plan, which wasn't given a hearing. When the **third, approved, plan** fell into Belgian hands, Hitler finally saw **Manstein's plan** and approved it.

Original plan 19th October 1939



Revised plan 29th October 1939



Approved plan 10th January 1940

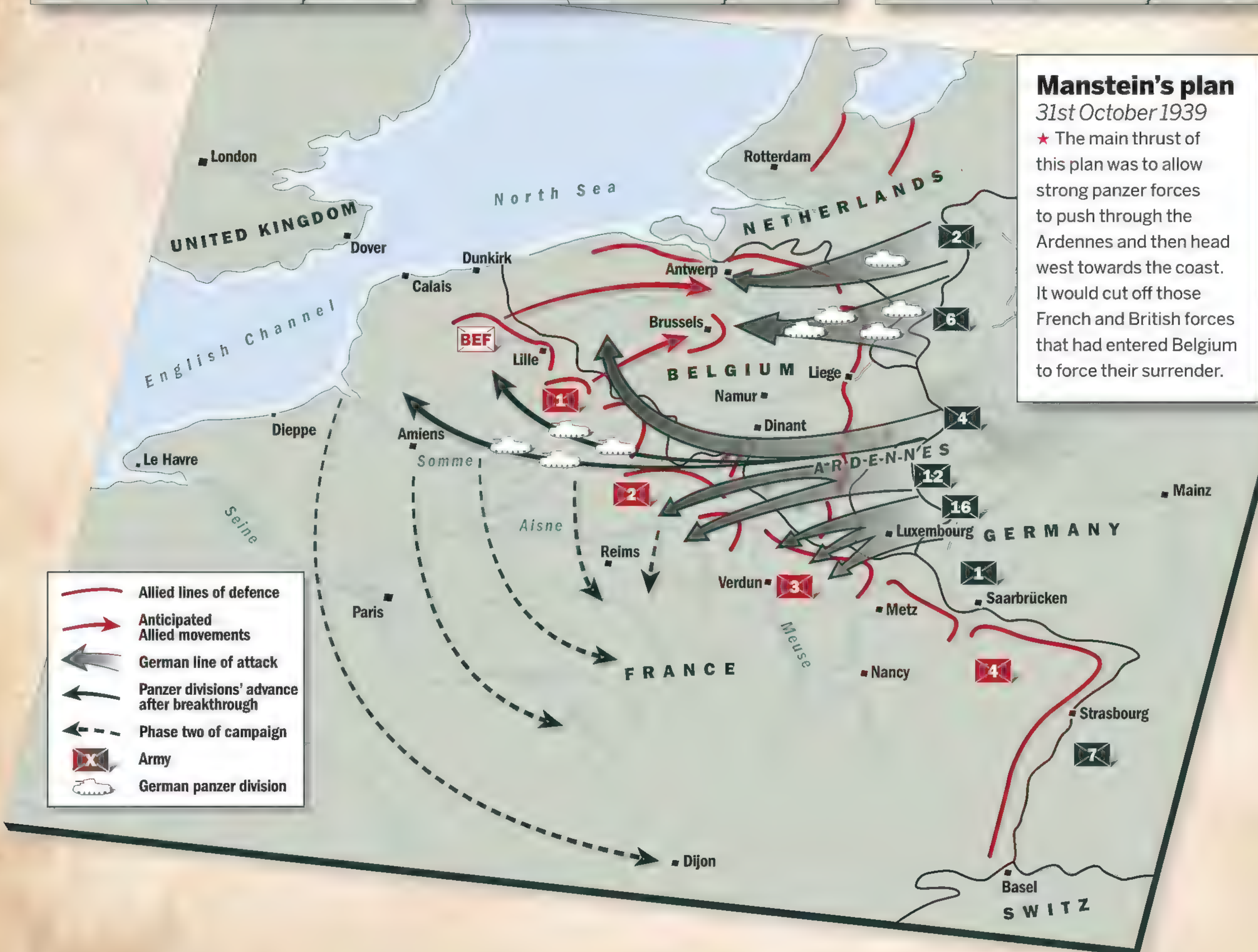


Manstein's plan

31st October 1939

★ The main thrust of this plan was to allow strong panzer forces to push through the Ardennes and then head west towards the coast. It would cut off those French and British forces that had entered Belgium to force their surrender.

- Allied lines of defence
- Anticipated Allied movements
- German line of attack
- Panzer divisions' advance after breakthrough
- Phase two of campaign
- Army
- German panzer division



- ▶ military operation of the last century and one of the three pillars on which his reputation rests.

Hitler liked the plan of a daring Panzer attack through the Ardennes and Guderian saw the possibilities for his armoured troops. Others were less impressed. After sending a series of memos, Manstein was promoted out of the way again. At the end of January 1940, he was appointed commander of XXXVIII Army Corps in East Prussia. Two weeks later, Hitler approved his plan.

Manstein was 700 km away on 10th May when France was invaded, learning about the attack from the news. That same evening, his corps was sent west. But even as his plan was proving devastatingly successful in practice, Manstein was left kicking his heels (“it has started and I am sitting at home”, he wrote in frustration). Finally, on 5th June, when phase two of the Battle of France began, XXXVIII Corps advanced across the Somme. Manstein proved an able blitzkrieg commander. He criss-crossed the front in a jeep, sometimes advancing in front of his own regiments. His infantry troops advanced rapidly, capturing Le Mans after marching 480 km in just seventeen days.

Manstein received the Knight’s Cross and was promoted to general. His corps was one of those earmarked for the invasion of Britain, but Hitler lost interest in Operation Sea Lion. His rivals tried to get Manstein transferred to North Africa, but instead in February he was appointed commander of LVI Panzer Corps. In May 1941, the first detailed plans for an attack on the Soviet Union appeared.

Manstein had no principled objections to invading the Soviet Union, even in his memoirs. His arguments were purely strategic. He brushed off the infamous Commissar Order (all political commissars of the Red Army should be executed on

“MANSTEIN WAS 700 KM AWAY WHEN FRANCE WAS INVADED, LEARNING ABOUT THE ATTACK FROM THE NEWS.”

the spot) by claiming he found it “unsoldierly” and that “the rest of the army probably shared my view”.

Nevertheless, in 1941 Manstein saw a clear link between communism and Judaism: in a speech at the start of Operation Barbarossa, he made it clear that the extermination of the Jewish Bolsheviks was “a dictate of our own survival”.

On 22nd June 1941, the invasion began. Manstein’s corps headed towards Leningrad, advancing 315 km in just four days, exhausting its fuel after capturing the bridges at Daugavpils in Latvia. It took a week for the rest of the army group to catch up. Throughout July, the group pushed north through deep forest, encountering increasingly fierce resistance. The advance stalled, but on 12th September, Manstein was transferred to the Black Sea coast to take command of the 11th Army. By the end of September, he’d reached the Crimea and after a further two months of fierce fighting, only Sevastopol remained in Soviet hands. Seven or eight German divisions had defeated a Soviet force twice their size.

Manstein established his headquarters in a school in Simferopol, where he would live for almost a year. He now took on Sevastopol, even though his troops were exhausted, and the weather was getting worse. A major attack in the second half of December failed, and Crimea became a target in Stalin’s winter offensives. In a howling snowstorm, a large Soviet force landed on the Kerch Peninsula. Manstein was unable to prevent the landing gaining a foothold and fighting ensued. The front then stood still until May when Manstein gathered a force large enough to tackle the Soviet position. After a week of fighting, the bridgehead had been smashed and the 11th Army had taken 170,000 prisoners.

On 2nd June 1942, Manstein attacked Sevastopol again. The 11th Army hacked its way forward during a month of horrific fighting, but after a bold landing operation, the Soviet defence finally collapsed. On 4th July, the fighting was over, and an exulted Hitler promoted Manstein to field marshal.

The Crimean Campaign was the second pillar of Manstein’s fame. It showed that he could lead an army and was more than just a master strategist at the planning table. He’d

Adolf Hitler shakes hands with Manstein during a visit to Army Group South’s headquarters in Ukraine, 1943.





Manstein monitors the battlefield with binoculars near Sevastopol on the Soviet Crimean front, 1942.

JLLSTEIN BILD/GETTY

won after ten months of hard fighting, and despite constantly being at a numerical disadvantage, Manstein's forces managed to inflict close to half a million losses. His ability to get the maximum out of his exhausted and depleted divisions was matched only by his ability to deny all knowledge of the genocide that took place in the Crimea. Einsatzgruppe D, which operated in the 11th Army's wake, was a group of methodical killers and even though Manstein himself does not seem to have shown any interest in their activities, he could not possibly have remained ignorant of it.

But as soon as Germany's crimes against humanity came up, Manstein took refuge behind long-winded expositions about military honour and an impressive ability to flatly deny any knowledge, hiding behind his stoic duty to his beloved Germany.

In August 1942, at the same time as the fighting at Stalingrad began, Manstein and the 11th Army were sent to besiege Leningrad. But they had little time to make an impact before being hit by a large-scale Soviet assault. In September, Manstein encircled two of the attacking armies, and the fighting died down. But at the end of October, he learned his eldest son had died in the battle. In his memoirs, Manstein conveyed genuine sadness, but

still felt compelled to talk about duty, sacrifice and the Fatherland.

On 19th November, Stalin launched Operation Uranus, trapping the German 6th Army in Stalingrad. In the ensuing panic, a three-hundred-kilometre hole opened up in German lines. Manstein was given the most difficult task of his life as a fifty-fifth birthday present: as commander of Army Group South, he must relieve Stalingrad and recover the German armies caught in the Caucasus, stabilising the southern front and rescuing what could be salvaged from a huge battlefield plagued by snowstorms. He failed, but it's unlikely anyone else could have done better. The attempt to rescue the 6th Army was made too late and with too few forces. Attempts to supply Stalingrad from the air also failed, but the forces in the Caucasus did at least escape.

After the war, everyone involved in the Stalingrad disaster blamed each other, but all were happy to condemn Hitler and Göring, both of whom were conveniently dead. In addition, we must consider Manstein's change of perspective towards the 6th Army – as soon it became clear it was beyond saving, his focus switched to preserving the army for as long as possible to tie up numerous Soviet divisions. The situation deteriorated rapidly, however, and while German army command disagreed over air bridges, ►

- ▶ the Soviets launched Operation Saturn to cut off the German forces in the Caucasus. Manstein's troops were able to fend off the attacks, but the Italian 8th Army collapsed and Soviet armoured units rushed towards Kharkov.

The battles around Kharkov in February 1943 marked the culmination of four months of endless crises for Army Group South as Manstein finally broke the Soviet advance with several virtuoso counterattacks. The front was preserved, and the situation stabilised. This four-month period, rounded off with the “backhand blow” at Kharkov became the third pillar of Manstein's legend. The achievement cannot be fully appreciated without understanding the extent of the difficulties he faced during this tumultuous time.

One of the by-products of Kharkov was the “Kursk Bulge”, which Manstein wanted to address as soon as the weather allowed. But planning dragged on and Manstein deferred to Hitler. By the time Operation Citadel finally launched in July 1943, the Red Army was dug in and ready. Not even the cream of the German Wehrmacht under Manstein and Walter Model could do anything about it. After a week of furious battles, the offensive was over. Manstein wanted to continue the operation, having convinced himself the Soviets had exhausted their reserves. But as if to prove how wrong he was, the Red Army launched a series of continuous offensives against Army Group South in mid-July that lasted for almost a year. The strategist Manstein had made a terrible error, and now only General Manstein could save him.

In September, Manstein finally received permission from Hitler to retreat to the Dnieper. Manstein ordered a ‘scorched earth’ policy for anything Army Group South couldn't take with it, a violation of international law that he again had little to say about afterwards. He preferred to focus on how he defeated a bold Soviet air landing at Kanev, and how he was devoted to trying to convince Hitler to give command of the entire Eastern Front – or even the war itself – to someone else (namely, Manstein). Kiev fell and Manstein continued to battle on with exhausted units. In January 1944, parts of Manstein's army group were trapped in what became known as the Korsun Pocket. When that situation was resolved, the 1st Panzer Army became trapped again, this time in Hube's Pocket, which was named after the army's commander.

On 30th March 1944, Manstein was awarded the Swords of the Knights Cross – and fired. He handed over his army group to Walter Model and then had to watch the Third Reich's collapse from the sidelines. The Allies stormed

“IN MARCH 1944, MANSTEIN WAS AWARDED THE SWORDS OF THE KNIGHTS CROSS – AND FIRED.”

ashore in Normandy and the Red Army crushed Army Group Centre as Manstein, who believed he could have resolved these crises too, ‘recovered’ at a health resort. The July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler passed him by, although he was probably aware of the conspiracy. Many officers may have looked to the subversive Manstein as Germany's saviour, but Manstein himself was trapped in a paralysing web of loyalty and tradition. He would later argue that “Prussian field marshals do not mutiny”. Putting oneself up against a head of state was unthinkable – even if it was Adolf Hitler.

In January 1945, the Manstein family were forced to flee their home. The Red Army was approaching fast. By the time of Germany's surrender, he was in the Lübeck region. One may ask how this model of patriotic duty felt as he watched Germany get crushed from the stands. His colleague Model had chosen to take his own life, following Hitler's implied order in January 1943 that German field marshals were never taken prisoner.

Manstein was arrested in August and ended up at Nuremberg, where he assisted the German general staff's defence team. There was no one like Manstein who could speak for the system he'd been literally born into, and his testimony helped lay the foundations for the myth of the “clean Wehrmacht”. This stipulated that the German army was a noble organisation deceived by Hitler. It had not been involved in any genocide, and simply obeyed orders. Manstein's ability to convey this image played a part in helping German army command avoid being labelled war criminals.

After the trial, Manstein was held in a detention camp in Wales. There he was visited by the British military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, whose book, *The Other Side of the Hill*, featured interviews with German commanders and helped launch the cult of the blameless German general, with Manstein one of its central characters. The myth was allowed to take root for the simple reason that the West needed the experience of Germany's tank warfare experts.

In 1948, at the Soviet Union's request, Manstein was finally prosecuted for war crimes. The charges were the same as those Manstein had helped the German general staff escape. But when it came to his own defence, he became tangled up in a series of



During the Nuremberg trials, von Manstein helped acquit the general staff, but in 1948 he himself was charged with war crimes and sentenced to 18 years in prison. But a large crowd of admirers and the West's need for generals with experience from the Eastern Front led to his release after four years.

ULLSTEIN BILD DTL/GETTY

contradictory half-truths. He stubbornly fell back on his honour as an officer – without understanding that he'd forfeited this by serving under Hitler. He was sentenced to 18 years, but after an outcry, the sentence was reduced to 12 years.

In 1951, the first of a long line of books was published on how the genius Manstein had fought against overwhelming communist hordes on the Eastern Front. Winston Churchill and the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer joined the list of his admirers, and more and more voices called for the honourable field marshal's early release. After just four years in prison, Manstein was freed in May 1953.

In 1955, Manstein's *Lost Victories* was published, a strangely sympathetic autobiography almost free of biographical details. To set the tone, the field marshal had two Western Allied historians explain to the reader at the start why this "military genius" provided "one of the most important and illuminating contributions to the history of World War II". Manstein then laid out a story of Hitler's

wretched leadership and his own brilliance. Many were seduced into ignoring what Manstein refused to discuss when he declared that "I have deliberately refrained from discussing political problems or matters". This allowed him to blame Hitler when it came to his many military mistakes, but conveniently avoid all talk of atrocities and mass murder by dismissing them as "political".

In the early 1950s, Manstein was part of an unlikely battle-hardened group of generals who acted as consultants when the West German army was formed. He published a second memoir, *A Soldier's Life*, which depicted his life until the outbreak of World War II. He was permitted to speak in the Bundestag and was constantly ready to leap to the defence of both his own – and his army's – honour. After Manstein, Nazi Germany's last-but-one surviving field marshal, died in Icking outside Munich on 6th June 1973, hundreds of veterans attended his funeral. ★

Anders Fager is a writer and former Swedish officer.

HEINZ GUDERIAN

Headstrong general won blitzkrieg

Heinz Guderian was a driving force in the development of German armoured weapons. His refusal to obey orders led Germany to **victory in France in 1940**. Niklas Zetterling profiles a stubborn warlord who was almost unique in military history.

Text: **NIKLAS ZETTERLING**



Heinz Guderian
commands the 2nd
Panzer Group from a
SdKfz 251/6 command
vehicle during the Battle
of Baturin in Ukraine,
September 1941.

Heinz Wilhelm Guderian

Born: 1888 in Kulm,
Prussia (now Poland).

Died: 1954 in
Schwangau, Bavaria.

Career: Colonel
1933, lieutenant
general 1938, general
1938, colonel general 1940.

Honours: Include the Iron Cross
(First and Second Class), and
Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross.

Writing: His most famous work
Achtung-Panzer! was published in
1937. It formed the basis for German
concepts of mobile warfare.

Quote: "There are no desperate
situations, only desperate people."



**The Knight's
Cross in 1939.**

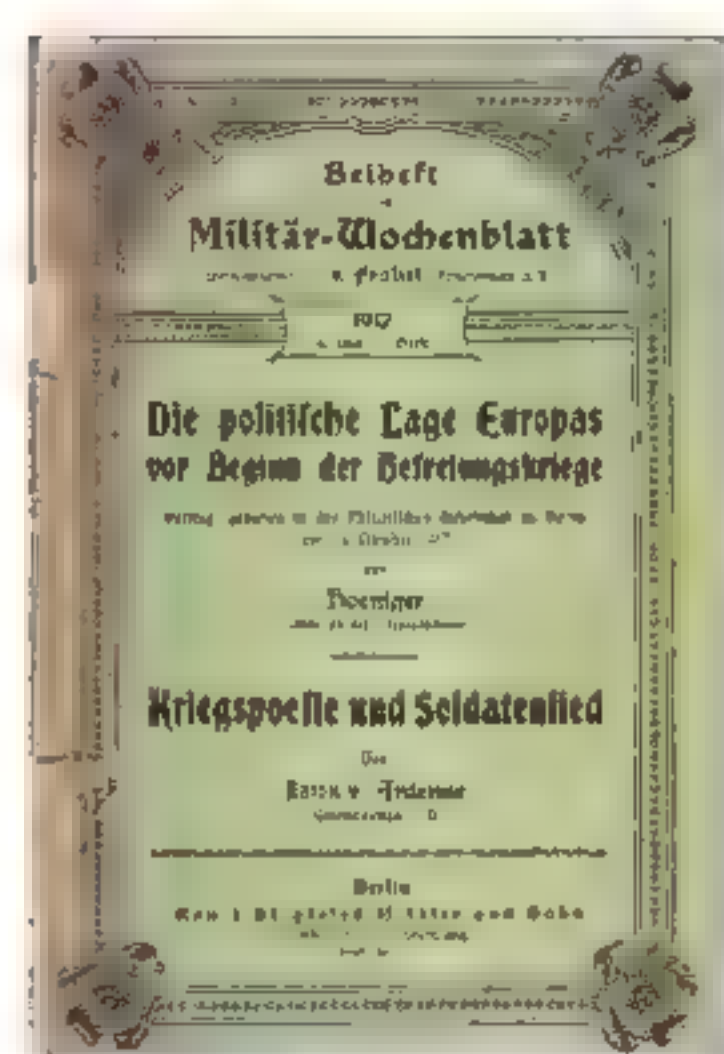


In September 1939, Guderian's XIX Army Corps invaded Poland. Heinz Guderian is shown here in his command vehicle on the right of the Panzer I and II tanks, demonstrating his conviction that a commander should lead from the front.

Thick mist covered the ground as day dawned on 1st September 1939, reducing visibility and making air support impossible. Heinz Guderian was travelling to the front in his armoured command vehicle, in keeping with his beliefs about a commander's role in war. On-board radio enabled him to stay in touch with both his staff and the units he was travelling to.

In war, however, nothing is predictable. Guderian was following the 3rd Panzer Division closely as it advanced into Polish territory. Suddenly, a German artillery shell exploded 50 metres in front of his vehicle. Guderian had barely recovered from the shock when another shell exploded 50 metres behind him. Convinced the next shell would be a direct hit, Guderian ordered his driver to turn around. However, the nervous soldier drove straight into a ditch, damaging the vehicle's steering system so badly it was no longer possible to drive. The general was forced to retreat on foot but managed to avoid being hit by his own artillery.

Thus began the very first phase of World War II for Guderian. It was quite unpleasant, but in accordance with his philosophy, his units continued



Guderian wrote articles about tanks for magazines such as *Militär-Wochenblatt*. This edition is from 1912.

their offensive independently while Guderian walked back to his staff headquarters, where he took the time to send a pointed comment to the artillerymen.

Heinz Guderian was born in West Prussia in 1888, the son of Senior Lieutenant Friedrich Guderian and Irtha Ottilie Guderian. At the age of 12, Heinz was sent to the cadet school in Karlsruhe. Seven years later, he'd attained the same rank his father had held when Guderian was born. During World War I, Guderian served in the signal corps, which contributed to his knowledge of radio communications and the importance of being able to lead units without being dependent on wired connections.

After 1918, Guderian became a staff officer in an independent *freikorps* (free corps) – the Iron Division – which fought against Soviet forces in the Baltics. He then served in the Reichswehr, the limited armed force Germany was permitted to retain under the Treaty of Versailles.

During the interwar period, Guderian's interest in armoured warfare grew. He read much of what was written, participated in debates, and contributed his own articles to magazines such as

“During the Polish campaign, Guderian led his units with skill”

Militär-Wochenblatt (Military Weekly). His role in the development of German armoured weapons has often been highlighted, but we should avoid exaggerating his impact. Other officers, such as Colonel Oswald Lutz and Lieutenant Ernst Volckheim, were more prominent.

Since Germany was not allowed to possess its own tanks, Guderian's first contact with this weapon system took place in Sweden in 1929. These were tanks manufactured by Swedish arms manufacturer Landsverk, which had developed early German models. Guderian himself was forced to carry out exercises at home with all kinds of mock-ups to mimic armoured vehicles and anti-tank weapons.

During the 1930s, Guderian moved more to the fore of armoured unit development, partly due to the expansion of the armed forces, which created ever-more career opportunities. He reached the rank of colonel in 1933, having already held important positions within the part of the general staff that was responsible for mobile units.

In 1933, Hitler watched an exercise organised by Guderian. The Nazi leader was impressed with what he saw. The extent to which the dictator was influenced is hard to determine, but it almost certainly gave him a more favourable impression of both the tank and Guderian. In any case, Guderian's career took off. He continued to argue and write about armoured units, and when the first three German armoured divisions were formed in 1935, he was given command of the 2nd Panzer Division.

During the second half of the 1930s, Guderian continued to rise through the ranks. In 1938, he was promoted to lieutenant general and given command of an army corps. By this time, the clouds of war were gathering across Europe. In the summer of 1939, it was increasingly clear that a German attack on Poland was imminent. As part of the preparations, XIX Army Corps was formed under Guderian's command.

When war broke out on 1st September, Guderian led his XIX corps from Pomerania into the Polish Corridor, which separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany. He quickly advanced to East Prussia, where the corps regrouped before launching an attack on Brest-Litovsk in the eastern part of Poland. The city fell on the evening of 16th September.

During the Polish campaign, Guderian led his units with skill and enjoyed substantial success. The September campaign helped confirm how

his theories on how tank units should be trained, organised and equipped would work in practice. He'd long emphasised the importance of good radio communication, that a commander should lead from the front, and that mobility was a weapon in itself. He had also led his units personally during the campaign in Poland, and while several other German officers adopted the same leadership style, Guderian was a highly visible proponent of this practice, which would become even clearer the next time he led his units in the field.

On 10th May 1940, the Germans launched a major offensive across Western Europe. The purpose of the attack has been subject to various interpretations. Since the operation culminated with perhaps the most crushing victory over a great power in modern times, it's tempting to conclude that the Germans' objective from the start was to overwhelm France with a lightning strike. Modern research, however, questions this view. Now, it's suggested that Hitler launched the offensive against the Western powers without such lofty expectations. Instead, he'd hoped to occupy Belgium and the Netherlands, which would provide the Luftwaffe with good bases for attacks on ports, industries and communications in Britain and France. In addition, enemy aircraft would find it more difficult to attack targets in Germany if German ground forces reached the English Channel.

Most senior German officers don't appear to have expected the Allied defences to collapse in the way they did. Neither were there many neutral observers who foresaw such a swift and decisive German victory. An important reason for this assessment was that on paper, the Allies were at least the Germans' equals in terms of personnel and equipment. In addition, they appeared to be fully prepared in carefully chosen defensive positions – many of which were fortified.

The German force was split into two army groups, spread across a line from the North Sea to the point where the German border touched both



Guderian in his SdKfz 251/6 half-track mobile command centre in France, 1940. An Enigma encryption machine can be seen in the foreground.

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HEINZ GUDERIAN

- Luxembourg and France. The bulk of the force – Army Group B – was in the north, with both forces meeting at a line between Cologne and Liège.

Army Group B caught the attention of the Allies, but it was Army Group A that was given the main role. It possessed most of the German panzer and motorised divisions, including General Hermann Hoth's XV Corps, which would attack the River Meuse in the area around Dinant in Belgium with two panzer divisions.

Further south, General Georg-Hans Reinhardt's XXXXI Corps would cross the Meuse at Monthermé in northern France. This corps also comprised two panzer divisions. Guderian's XIX Corps had been placed on the south wing of the army group. With its three panzer divisions and the elite Panzergrenadier Division Großdeutschland, XIX Corps was the strongest German corps and would play a critical role during the campaign.

The orders Guderian received provided no detailed instructions or objectives other than to secure a bridgehead over the River Meuse at Sedan in northern France. However, he himself set a target much further west, namely the Channel coast. For Guderian, the river crossing was only a waypoint.

During the first days of the attack, Guderian's corps advanced through Luxembourg and south-eastern Belgium. The German attack force's biggest obstacle during this period was traffic congestion. The operation largely went to plan, and Allied air forces failed to slow down Guderian's units. As the XIX Corps closed in on Sedan from the north and

east, the Luftwaffe was able to support XIX Corps' ground forces as they crossed the River Meuse. Air support came courtesy of the 2nd Air Corps, led by Lieutenant General Bruno Lörzer, who'd agreed with Guderian that the air force would be best deployed providing continuous – but less concentrated – support. Just before the attack began, however, an order came from higher up to instead direct a massive air strike against the French positions at Sedan before the German army units began their river crossing.

Neither Guderian nor Lörzer liked the solution, so pretended the new orders had come too late, instead sticking to their original plan. Their disobedience would prove beneficial – air forces weren't good at immobilising ground units but were a decent deterrent. Their more limited air strikes also destroyed many French telephone lines, crippling the French's top-down command structure due to their lack of radios. This was the first clear example of how Guderian – this time in concert with Lörzer – was happy to push through decisions against high command orders that resulted in success on the battlefield. More examples would follow.

Guderian's corps crossed the Meuse at Sedan faster than most observers expected. Air support provides one possible explanation for its rapid success – most historians suggest it was a contributing factor, but far from the most important. After all, both XXXXI and XV Corps to the north were equally successful, despite lacking significant support from the Luftwaffe.

All three corps shared some common elements: first, the commanders were able to use their own initiative, thanks to the Germans' decentralised decision-making structure, their panzer divisions were flexible, radio communication was good, and – not least – the officers and crew were all well trained. Everything, in fact, that Guderian had previously advocated.

Guderian's approach to responding to orders from superiors became even clearer in the week that followed. His corps quickly established a bridgehead on the west side of the Meuse and Guderian immediately saw opportunities to advance west. This was not, however, something that senior German commanders were set on. Despite this, the headstrong general chose to continue under the pretext of making room for those units following on behind, specifically General Gustav von Wietersheim's XIV Corps. Despite receiving a direct order to halt shortly afterwards, Guderian managed to obtain permission to continue advancing for another day. During this day, he pushed his forces westwards at the highest possible speed.

German high command noticed what Guderian was doing and instructed his immediate superior, ►

The city of Rouen in Normandy was almost completely destroyed during the German invasion in June 1940.



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

Breakthrough at Sedan

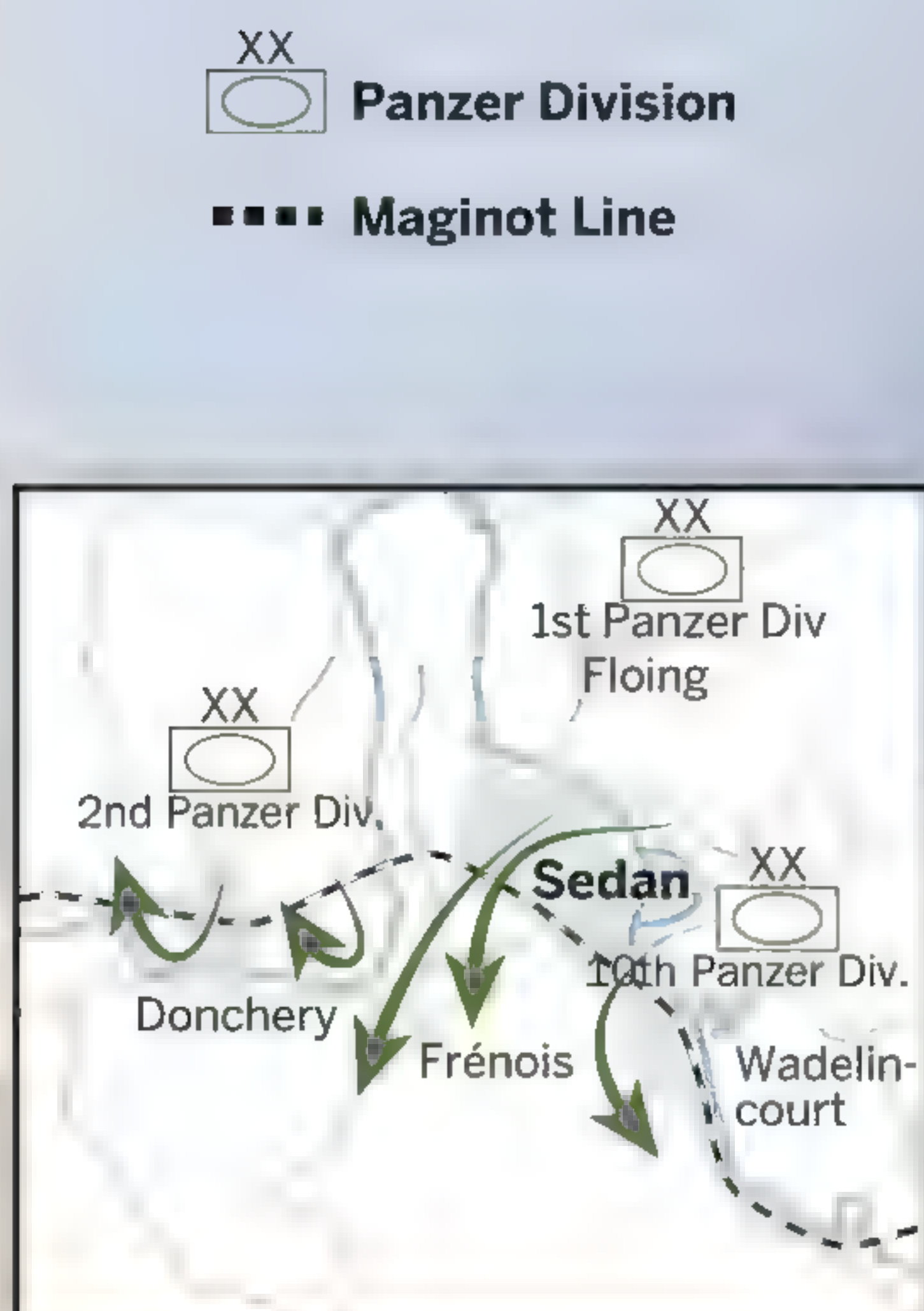
★ On 10th May 1940, most of the German panzer forces were grouped south of a line between Liège and Cologne.

There were Guderian's three panzer divisions, which attacked Sedan (bottom arrow), and Georg-Hans Reinhardt's two panzer divisions (second lowest arrow).

Hermann Hoth's two panzer divisions attacked across the

River Meuse a little further north, in the direction of Dinant.

Guderian's XIX Corps, comprising three panzer divisions and the elite Panzergrenadier Division Großdeutschland, came to play a central role. After the corps' breakthrough at Sedan, the divisions moved further west towards the coast, contrary to orders from high command.



“For Guderian, the river crossing at Sedan was only a waypoint”

German Panzer 38(t) tanks led by Guderian and Rommel wait to cross the River Meuse in May 1940.



German Dornier Do 17Z light bomber on its way to Sedan to support Guderian's ground forces at the crossing of the Meuse.

► Colonel Ewald von Kleist, to order a halt. By this point, XIX Corps had advanced 120 kilometres west of Sedan, while XXXXI and XV Corps had made similar progress to the north.

Guderian was furious. He knew that he was just 100 km from the Channel coast and asked to be relieved of his command. Von Kleist accepted. The stop order probably came from Hitler himself – von Kleist seems to have had the same opinion as Guderian but was forced to be the bearer of bad news. One indication of this is that a few days earlier, he'd been ordered to halt Reinhardt's XXXXI Corps in a similar fashion. On that occasion, however, von Kleist had claimed that the order had arrived too late.

At that point, Colonel General Wilhelm List, commanding the 12th Army, intervened. He flew to Guderian and persuaded him to remain as corps commander and gave him permission to conduct "reconnaissance in force". Guderian didn't hesitate to act on the proposal. He

ordered his divisions to go west as soon as possible but forbade them to use radio communications that could be intercepted by German high command. In this way, Guderian disguised his actions.

On 20th May, he reached the Channel coast without any further hindrance from senior commanders. This effectively set the course for the rest of the campaign, even though it wasn't clear to many at the time. The Allied troops were subsequently surrounded in Dunkirk and forced to either surrender or flee over the sea to Britain, leaving all their equipment behind.

On 5th June, the Germans attacked the remaining French units. For this operation, Guderian's XIX Corps was transformed into Panzer Group Guderian, which comprised two corps. The German units, not least those under Guderian's command, moved decisively to force France to a swift surrender.

The German victory in the west in the spring and summer of 1940 was extremely surprising and largely down to Guderian's determination. He consistently ignored his superiors' orders, and almost dragged them along in his wake as he defeated the French units that stood in front of him. His success was quite unusual in military history, and Guderian had achieved it with his trademark leadership style combined with units he'd helped develop.

The latter point is worth emphasising because the Germans did not enjoy a numerical advantage. Neither could their equipment be said to be generally superior. But the German units had been trained to act with more speed and inventiveness, and so fought more effectively than the Allies.

Hitler's largest operation was the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22nd June 1941. This time, Operation Barbarossa had been planned from the outset with panzer units playing the main role. Almost all German armoured divisions had been allocated to four panzer groups. Of these, the two strongest were given to



French prisoners of war in the Sedan area in 1940. Germany took a total of around two million prisoners during the campaign.



Strength ratios 1940					
PERSONNEL (army)					
Total	5,500,000	640,000	400,000	1,600,000	4,200,000
On the Western Front	2,240,000	640,000	400,000	500,000	3,000,000
TANKS					
Total	4,111	270	40	Unknown	3,505
On the Western Front	3,254	270	40	640	2,773
ARTILLERY					
Total	10,700	1,338	656	1,280	7,378
AIRCRAFT*					
Total	3,097	140	82	1,150	3,578
On the Western Front	879	118	72	384	2,589

*Bombers and fighters

Army Group Centre, which had been tasked with advancing on Moscow.

Guderian was assigned command of the 2nd Panzer Group, which fought on Army Group Centre’s southern wing. Together with Colonel General Hoth’s 3rd Panzer Group (on the north wing of the army group), it formed the main battalion of all German units that launched the attack on the Soviet Union. Each group had around one thousand tanks.

Hoth and Guderian advanced through Belarus with exceptional speed. After six days, Guderian had penetrated 450 km into Soviet territory, which meant he was now able to begin preparations to cross the Dnieper. En route, both he and Hoth had encircled and defeated numerous Soviet units, including significant armoured forces.

It was an operational success that easily surpassed the offensive in 1940. Guderian crossed the Dnieper

in the area around Mogilev and captured Smolensk on 16th July, which meant he’d travelled over two-thirds of the distance between the border and Moscow. So far, the German offensive had gone virtually like clockwork, but now they started to encounter more serious resistance.

Even during the planning phase, the Germans knew that supply and maintenance problems would worsen as the units penetrated further into Soviet territory. A pause in the advance had therefore been anticipated, but it proved longer than intended. One reason was that Soviet reserves were significantly larger than the Germans thought. Another important reason was that the Germans had not agreed on their direction of travel after crossing the Dnieper in the central sector.

For Guderian, the target was crystal clear. He wanted to push on to Moscow as soon as possible. This was an opinion he shared with most German

Eastern Front 1941. Guderian, commander of the 2nd Panzer Group, salutes motorcycle-borne infantry in the Soviet Union.

“He consistently ignored his superiors’ orders”



SCHERL / SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / RITZAU SCANPIX

HEINZ GUDERIAN

► officers. One reason for their view was that they determined that most Soviet reinforcements would be sent to the Moscow region. The Germans wanted to combat the enemy's main force and defeat it.

This view contradicted Hitler's intentions. The Führer's main objectives involved taking Leningrad, the fertile lands of Ukraine and the Caucasian oil fields. He thought in economic terms – ensuring Germany had enough grain and oil (the Fatherland was particularly short on the latter), while simultaneously depriving Stalin of those resources. As a result, he wanted Guderian's panzer group to turn south, while directing Hoth's armoured force towards Leningrad.

Guderian did all he could to prevent this, deploying his units in such a way to make it difficult to redirect them in a direction other than Moscow.

Hitler's thinking would prove to be illogical. Although economic factors were extremely important, he was looking for a quick fix, while such details tend to be more effective in the long run. The solution advocated by Guderian had a better chance of leading to a decisive outcome in 1941, but disagreements led to delay, and when

Hitler finally forced his will, Guderian would be obliged to quickly redirect his panzer group. At 19.00 on 22nd August, the 2nd Panzer Group was asked if it were possible to change its direction of attack 12 degrees to the south into Ukraine.

Guderian remained firmly opposed and on the 23rd flew to Army Group Centre's commander, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, to discuss how this could be avoided. In the afternoon, they flew on to Rastenburg to try to persuade Hitler to change his mind. This failed and on the morning of the 24th, Guderian ordered his units to change direction and instead head south. This he managed with astonishing speed. The same day, they broke through Soviet defences and by the evening of 25th had penetrated a further 120 kilometres south. Guderian's units had demonstrated astonishing flexibility and mobility.

The attack into Ukraine was a huge success, the icing on the cake a gigantic pincer manoeuvre that saw 663,000 Soviet soldiers captured. But it had delayed the attack on Moscow by one month.

On 30th September, however, Guderian was able to turn in a north-easterly direction again,



GALERIE BILDERWELT/GETTY IMAGES

Operation Barbarossa started at 04.45 on 22nd June 1941. A Tauchpanzer III amphibious tank from the 18th Panzer Regiment (part of the 18th Panzer Division) crosses the River Bug.

“For Guderian, the target was clear. He wanted to push on to Moscow as soon as possible”

and two days later the other parts of Army Group Centre continued their advance. Guderian moved with exceptional speed and within four days had reached Oryol, 368 km south-west of Moscow. Other units in Army Group Centre were also extremely successful. In the space of two weeks, most of the Soviet defensive forces west of Moscow had been surrounded. The Germans took a further 670,000 prisoners of war and the road to the Soviet capital was open. But now the weather intervened as the autumn rains turned the ground to mud, halting the German units again.

S talin made good use of the time the rainy season bought him and brought forward more reserves. By the time the temperatures had dropped to harden the ground, he'd both patched up the front and deployed reserves that could be used in a counter-offensive. Although the Germans – including Guderian – were able to push even closer to Moscow, they did so only by stretching their supply lines even further. The risks of this were made clear when the Red Army counter-attacked on 6th December. The Soviet offensive could be met by either a mobile or static defence (where units would attempt to hold their positions for as long as possible). Guderian was one who advocated a mobile defence, and when he defied the orders he'd been given, was stripped of his command. Thus, he would no longer lead units in battle.

F or just over a year, Guderian was left kicking his heels in the reserve forces. During his absence, the fortunes of war had turned against the Germans. In the winter of 1942–43, the Germans suffered a massive defeat at Stalingrad, which may have contributed to Hitler bringing Guderian in from the cold.

On 1st March, he took up a new position as Inspector General of Armoured Troops, which gave him an opportunity to direct the development of new tanks and panzer units.

From 1943, however, Germany's position was hopeless. While it may not have been obvious at this point, Allied manpower and industrial resources were so superior that the end of the war was inevitable. This was especially true in tank production. Although Guderian did what he could to increase German production, dwindling industrial



facilities, raw supplies and labour ensured the Allies maintained a considerable lead.

Germany's increasingly desperate situation led to several attempts to assassinate Hitler. On 20th July 1944, the most notable attempt was carried out, but Hitler survived the plot to take brutal revenge on the conspirators.

The next day, Guderian was appointed acting chief of general staff, a position that had once been extremely prestigious. By this time, however, Hitler had completely taken control of military operations and the role was little more than advisory. As usual, Guderian remained outspoken and stubborn, and often opposed Hitler. Nevertheless, he was tolerated by the Führer until March 1945, when he was put on 'convalescent leave'. He received no new command.

G ermany surrendered in early May 1945, and on 10th May, Guderian was taken into captivity by the US. He was released in 1948 and served as an adviser when West Germany's army was rebuilt in the 1950s. Guderian wrote his memoirs in 1950. In these, he emphasised – unsurprisingly – his own role in the development of the German tank. He glossed over the army's involvement in the Third Reich's crimes, but his descriptions of the actual military operations appear to be credible.

Guderian had undoubtedly lived an eventful life when he died aged 65 in 1954. His influence on the development of German panzer forces was significant, but many officers were involved. However, Guderian demonstrated his skills as a general, both during the campaign in Western Europe in 1940 and during Operation Barbarossa. 🇩🇪

Niklas Zetterling is a military history writer.

Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, Adolf Hitler and Heinz Guderian study the plan for the upcoming Ardennes Offensive in southern Belgium between December 1944 and January 1945.

He went down in history as Britain's top army commander during World War II. At the same time, despite all his victories, Montgomery has been ranked as one of the worst generals ever, mainly due to his personality. Mathias Forsberg rates "Monty's" efforts, from North Africa to Remagen.

Bernard Law Montgomery

AVERAGE OR BRILLIANT GENERAL?

He was perceived as arrogant and inflexible by his British superiors. US commanders grumbled about convoluted attack plans and protracted preparation times. The Germans perceived his tactics as rigid and predictable. Almost everyone considered Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery impossible to work with – and yet he was an often-reprimanded commander who still won most of his battles.

A key part of Montgomery's problem stemmed from his personality and rebellious behaviour. "To get on in the British Army, you have to be a bit of a bastard," Montgomery said while still a major. "I am a bit of a bastard."

The paradox of "Monty" was that he personified qualities that weren't typically British. He was difficult, arrogant, did not respect dress codes and was generally reluctant to cooperate with others. Nevertheless, he became a hero to the English-

speaking population of the British Empire. What primarily laid the foundations for his legendary status was his victory over the Afrika Korps and "Desert Fox" Erwin Rommel.

Over the following pages, we'll take a closer look at the fronts on which Montgomery operated during World War II. What decisions did he make, and on what grounds?

Was he a misunderstood genius, or was it rather down to the general Allied success that allowed his mistakes to be glossed over? ✖

**"HE WAS AN OFTEN-
REPRIMANDED COMMANDER
WHO STILL WON MOST
OF HIS BATTLES"**



IWM/GETTY IMAGES

Montgomery during the Second Battle of El Alamein, November 1942. Here he celebrated one of his greatest triumphs.

“MONTY’S” CAMPAIGNS:
NORTH AFRICA, NORMANDY, THE
NETHERLANDS, ANTWERP AND
THE CROSSING OF THE RHINE

1 WESTERN DESERT CAMPAIGN

Was slow and methodical but made no mistakes

Montgomery's positive traits included his deep professionalism and strong understanding of how to inspire and motivate soldiers to success. During the latter half of the Desert War in North Africa, he drove around in his distinctive khaki trousers, sweater and beret, urging his soldiers to be both bold and optimistic. He developed a solid training programme, designed to provide the Eighth Army with a single, focussed plan for the upcoming campaign. A new, refreshing wave of self-confidence quickly spread among the troops.

THE WAR IN North Africa from 1940–43 may appear to have been a single long epic battle between British forces and Rommel, but it's easier to understand if we divide it into three phases.

At the start, a British army defeated a numerically superior Italian force. Then phase two saw the Afrika Korps arrive with Erwin Rommel to support



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Montgomery takes a break in the desert in 1942.

the creaking Italian units. During this phase, German-Italian forces inflicted defeat after defeat on what had become a much larger British Empire army. In the summer of 1942, Rommel managed to push his soldiers to their limits and advance swiftly towards Egypt, closing to within 90 kilometres of Alexandria at El Alamein.

THE FINAL PHASE then began with Montgomery's appointment as Eighth Army commander. He started with more reinforcements before driving the Afrika Korps all the way back to Tunisia. The US Army joined them at Morocco, but the battle was extended into May 1943 thanks to the Afrika Korps' fierce fighting spirit. Rommel had been on sick leave prior to the Third Battle of El Alamein but on his return found himself limited to managing a retreat.

The British made no major errors here and were able to drive the Germans and Italians out of Africa. The harsh criticism directed their way was down

Australian soldiers storm a German stronghold in North Africa.



NORTH AFRICA 1940–43

Warring parties:

Germany	Italy
United Kingdom	Vichy France
United States, etc	

Montgomery's contribution: Worked methodically and made no mistakes but could have defeated the enemy sooner.

to the fact that Rommel – if you look at the relative size of each army – should never have been as successful as he was. Nevertheless, Montgomery's appointment turned the tide, and helped cement his legendary status as the general who defeated the hitherto unbeatable Rommel. ❖

"ROMMEL SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS HE WAS"

BUNDESARCHIV, BILD 1011-786-0327-19



Field Marshal Erwin Rommel discusses the military situation with German and Italian officers in North Africa, 1942.

Rommel's desert victories secured his legendary status

★ Erwin Rommel became known as the "Desert Fox" after his arrival in North Africa in February 1941. In France in 1940, he'd commanded the 7th Panzer Division – dubbed the "Ghost Division" for its ability to appear where the enemy least expected it.

By the time Montgomery entered the fray, Rommel had won several stunning victories, but only by overstressing both himself and his supply lines. When the Second Battle of El Alamein began, Rommel was back in Germany at a health resort, receiving treatment for what today would be known as burnout. When he returned, the army was in retreat.

Two months later, and the Germans had been forced back 2,000 kilometres to Tunisia. Six months later and the Afrika Korps had surrendered. Rommel had thus won his huge victories against Montgomery's predecessors in the region.

Rommel was a propagandist's dream and quickly secured a starring role in the Third Reich's war

reports. His victories in exotic Africa made him a legend in Germany, while the Desert Fox's reputation among British soldiers was so strong that the Eighth Army's staff officers gave orders that they should speak of "the Germans" or "the enemy", not of "Rommel".

His reputation was strengthened by the fact no war crimes or attacks on Jews were carried out in Africa. Instead, Montgomery deftly exploited Rommel's legendary status by making sure he became the general who defeated him.

After Africa, Rommel gained command of Army Group B in France. He was seriously injured in an air raid six weeks after D-Day and played no part in the fighting. As a suspect in the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, he was asked to commit suicide with the promise of a state funeral instead of being brought to justice. His legendary status was so strong that not even Hitler would not have dared to execute him in public.

2 NORMANDY CAMPAIGNS

Soldiers were blamed for general's bad strategy

In the summer of 1944, Montgomery and Rommel met again in Normandy. This time round, however, the campaign was anything but an epic duel. Rommel wasn't there personally commanding a force of armoured divisions protecting the coast as he'd wanted, but found himself appointed to an odd role planning the urgent upgrade of the coastal Atlantic Wall's defences with new fortifications and minefields.

Six weeks into the campaign, the German Desert Fox was wounded in an Allied air raid and was shipped home to Germany for the rest of the war. In October 1944, he was forced to commit suicide. The two arch-rivals never met in real life.

The most interesting factors surrounding Montgomery's campaign in Normandy are:

1. The Allied strategy
2. The campaign's objective
3. The timetable for the breakout

Operation Overlord's aim was to capture the city of Caen on the day of invasion. This would act as secure base for the next phase – to begin no later than 90 days after landing – that would see an armoured advance carry the Allies east of the River Seine.

BOTH CAEN AND the Normandy breakout plagued Montgomery from the beginning. The Germans held Caen for over a month after D-Day and the Allies made no progress well into July 1944. Despite enjoying a huge numerical advantage on the ground and almost total superiority in the air, the breakout everyone expected never came. Several British-Canadian offensives against German lines were carried out during July and August 1944, the most famous of which was Operation Goodwood.

In his memoirs, Montgomery wrote that the plan for the operation was that the British-Canadian sector would tie up most of the German panzer units so the US could break out and launch mobile operations further west. That was eventually the case – but not until the end of July 1944.

IF WE EXAMINED what Montgomery actually said during the war, rather than what he wrote in hindsight, a more complicated picture emerges. Several official British press releases issued by Montgomery's staff in late June and July 1944 stressed that once British forces managed to reach



more open terrain south of Caen, the advance would speed up considerably.

British armoured forces would then be able to shift to mobile warfare. It was abundantly clear that the aim of British operations was to break through the German line and advance in depth. Given Montgomery's competitive and autocratic personality traits, this seems a reasonable interpretation. It appears that he intended – without US support – to be the one who broke the German armies in Normandy.

During July and August 1944, Montgomery led British-Canadian forces in a series of operations against German lines. Caen's capture – almost six weeks behind schedule – along with Operation Goodwood achieved very little territorial gains in return for horrific losses. The main theory ascribed was that the 21st Army Group's leadership – ultimately Montgomery himself – deployed the wrong strategy, given its resources.

When recalling the campaign, Montgomery claimed the strategy was only ever designed to

“HE WAS EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO ALTER HIS ORIGINAL PLAN”



In his memoirs, Montgomery embellished his efforts.



British infantry march through the village of Douet after liberating Bayeux on 7th June 1944. It was one of the first cities freed after the Normandy landings.

tie up the enemy rather than achieve a full-blown breakout – in fact, the operation's aim was precisely the opposite.

British-Canadian troops were poorly prepared for their mobile operations – above all else, there was a breakdown in coordination between infantry and tank forces. British armoured divisions were too dependent on superiors allocating them additional support. Panzer Group West described British infantry as only being effective when they had artillery or air support behind them. German soldiers and officers had been trained to act independently on their own initiative, while Allied soldiers and officers were trained for a top-down system.

IN PRACTICE, BRITISH military commanders kept their faith in methods reminiscent of World War I warfare rather than the mobile operations Montgomery's press releases spoke of, which remained theoretical. Even more remarkable is Montgomery's failure to learn anything from German officers' ability to take the initiative during the African campaign. The slow and predictable nature of British attack tactics made it easier for Germans to both spot impending attacks and take appropriate action.

Montgomery's countermove – to plan yet more ponderous and top-down operations – left no room

for initiative further down the chain of command. When the breakout finally came, Montgomery applied the handbrake. After their success at Avranches at the end of July, the Allies realised they now had an excellent chance to surround the German units east of Mortain. All that was needed were some new lines of attack, but Montgomery was extremely reluctant to alter his original plan. He'd originally commanded all Allied units in Normandy from 6th June, but from 1st August – as planned – had been left in command of just the British-Canadian sector.

IT WASN'T UNTIL 8th August that the decision was finally made to try to encircle the Germans using a pincer movement that would meet at the commune of Argentan. US units were considerably more mobile than their German counterparts, and a huge pincer manoeuvre might have destroyed almost all German forces in France if it had been deployed quick enough – especially as Hitler had refused to countenance a major retreat. Instead, a minor variant was implemented that was characterised by an equally minor failure – again, largely due to British senior command.

In conclusion, Montgomery and his Allied unit staffs had planned for one type of warfare in France but had found themselves fighting another. It cost time and the lives of Allied soldiers. ★



Thousands of Allied paratroopers floated down across the Netherlands in September 1944. Their mission was to secure the bridges to the Ruhr region.

3 DUTCH FAILURE

Admitted no mistakes during Operation Market Garden

After the breakout from Normandy and liberation of Paris, the German Army was in full retreat by late August 1944. After having taken a month to push 50 kilometres into Normandy, Allied units were now advancing the same distance every day. Reports from Belgium, the Netherlands and eastern France spoke of columns of German troops withdrawing in a disorderly fashion towards Germany.

IN BRITAIN AT the same time, an army corps of 35,000 paratroopers – comprising one British and



Stanislaw Sosabowski was a critic.

two US airborne divisions – stood waiting to support the advance. However, the front was moving east so fast that the paratroopers began to grumble that the war would end before they had time to leave Britain.

AT THIS POINT, Montgomery overcame his reserve and went direct to Eisenhower – supreme commander of all Allied forces in Europe since 1st September – with his plan for Operation Market Garden. From northern Belgium, Britain's XXX Corps would advance north along a 100-kilometre road in support of the airborne divisions, who would



first land and occupy five strategic bridges over which the British tanks could roll. Once over the final bridge, in Arnhem, the road would be open to Germany's Ruhr region. Montgomery's bold plan would be the stroke of genius that ended the war.

GERMAN RESISTANCE IN the Netherlands consisted mostly of "old men or boys", claimed the plan's supporters, and Monty had laid a bet of ten pounds with Eisenhower that the war would be over before Christmas 1944.

Operation Market Garden was, as we know, a complete disaster. Britain's 1st Airborne Division landed straight into the area where II SS Panzer Corps had assembled its tanks and was wiped out in six days of fierce fighting. The Germans blew up two of the bridges and XXX Corps became stuck again and again, despite the fact the US paratrooper divisions had initially succeeded in securing their bridges. Allied casualties came to around 17,500 dead, wounded or missing, of whom nearly 13,000 were British. German losses were almost half that number and the bridge in Arnhem remained intact in German hands.

In his memoirs, Montgomery described the operation as "90 per cent successful", which led Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands to state sourly, "My country can never again afford the luxury of another Montgomery success." The problem was that while the plan itself was a bold one, it was rigid, as there weren't many alternatives to the only road to Arnhem. Once again, the Germans managed to take full advantage of a chaotic situation to strike back.

It became – in short – "a bridge too far" as one unconvinced officer argued before the offensive. In

"HE REFUSED TO REVISE THE PLAN AFTER NEW INTELLIGENCE EMERGED"

fact, in the days prior to the operation, there were several indications that the conditions for Market Garden weren't favourable. Montgomery wasn't alone in silencing his critics – once Eisenhower had approved his plan, which allocated the bulk of the increasingly limited supplies to the British-Canadian sector, the supreme commander was extremely keen to see it implemented, too.

THERE WAS ALSO no plan B – the operation continued despite the problems that immediately became apparent. For example, the Polish airborne brigade, as part of the British division, only parachuted in on the fifth day of the offensive due to bad weather and lack of radio communication. The Polish paratroopers literally ended up directly in the line of German machine-gun fire and their commander Stanislaw Sosabowski became one of Montgomery's fiercest critics.

In retrospect, it's difficult to determine whether the attack warranted the risk Montgomery was willing to take with Operation Market Garden. Germany was obviously on the ropes, a well-aimed blow might cause the country's collapse, and the plan provided a good opportunity to apply the knockout punch. But at the same time, Montgomery's worst qualities came to the fore when he refused to revise the plan after new intelligence emerged. The fact he subsequently refused to acknowledge that Market Garden was a failure adds weight to the negative points made about the inflexible Brit. ❌

British troops raise their hands after surrendering at Arnhem in September 1944.





IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

4 ANTWERP & SCHELDT

Failed to secure the entrance to the port

When Operation Market Garden was greenlit, it highlighted a serious obstacle for the Allies. This was the Belgian city of Antwerp, which was one of Europe's largest ports in the 1940s and crucial for Allied logistics. The city was captured in early September, but the Allies also needed control of the Scheldt estuary to access the port – the river flowed through the city.

SCHELDT WAS PART of the Canadian First Army's sector, which lacked strength because all major resources had been channelled into Market Garden. Here, Montgomery made another serious error – although Eisenhower was also complicit – as the pair had allowed the Germans to dig themselves into the area to block the entrance to Antwerp.

As a result, the Allies were unable to use the large port, even though their supply chain increasingly required one. The French channel ports the Allies had captured up to that point were almost unusable due to fierce fighting coupled with the German engineering troops' methodical blasting and mining work around the harbours.

IF THE ENTRANCE to Antwerp had been taken, materials could have been shipped directly to the port, just behind the front, instead of being driven all the way from Normandy's ports in trucks. Supplies were the Allies' major concern, and if they'd focussed on clearing the Scheldt estuary, they would have solved their problem. Instead, Montgomery chose to deploy Market Garden, which gave the Germans time to prepare a strong



defence along the river with bunkers, flooded areas and extensive minefields. It would take British and Canadian troops two months at a cost of 12,000 losses before Scheldt was secured. The first ship finally arrived in Antwerp at the end of November 1944, but by then it was already too late. ❏

**“THE ALLIES WERE
UNABLE TO USE THE
LARGE PORT”**

5 CROSSING THE RHINE

Refused to change plan despite a captured bridge

Operation Market Garden was the exception to Montgomery's usual approach to the art of war. Ordinarily, planning would be meticulous, fixed schedules had to be followed, and no adventurous detours from the plan were allowed. Such a rigid policy is difficult in the business of war, where unforeseen events are the rule rather than the exception. However, Montgomery's extreme reluctance to change a defined plan to exploit a favourable development had no limits.

The war's most obvious example of this came on 9th March 1945, when US troops at the city of Remagen managed, against all odds, to capture a bridge intact over the River Rhine. Omar Bradley, commanding the Twelfth United States Army Group, immediately ordered that all available units be brought to the bridgehead to get as many US troops across as possible.

THE RHINE WAS a powerful river, over a kilometre wide in places, making it the Allies' greatest geographical obstacle after the English Channel. Planning for the crossing, Operation Plunder, had been in progress since January 1945 and had reached almost the same scale as Operation



General George Patton.

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Overlord. The date for crossing was set for 24th March, but after the bridge had been captured unexpectedly, most believed it would be best to cross immediately. No, countered Montgomery, who insisted the previously set plan should stand.

Despite the fact the Third US Army under General George Patton – one of Montgomery's fiercest critics and rivals – had taken the initiative by crossing the Main (a Rhine tributary), the great offensive was forced to halt and wait until 24th March.

WE SHOULD BEAR in mind that the German army on the eastern bank of the Rhine was merely a thin line of reserve units. Almost all German panzer units had been transferred to the Eastern Front, where the Red Army now stood just 70 kilometres from Berlin. One month after Plunder, US forces had driven straight through Germany to Leipzig, the Ruhr region had surrendered, and Hamburg was in British hands. When it comes to the idea that crossing the Rhine couldn't be sped up, Montgomery's stubborn refusal to change the plan of attack was completely unnecessary. A top-class military commander must be able to adapt and improvise based on a favourable strategic position. The bridge at Remagen demonstrated Montgomery had not mastered that ability. ★

Below: US soldiers at the captured bridge in Remagen, Germany. March 1945.



RHINE 1945

Warring parties:

United Kingdom
 Germany
 US, etc

Montgomery's contribution: Refused to bring forward the plan for the offensive across the River Rhine, despite the US unexpectedly capturing a bridge intact, while German defences were weak.

GENERAL AT ODDS WITH ALL

“Monty” was brusque, boastful – and methodical

Montgomery is best remembered as a man who sought conflict with other officers while refusing to cooperate. There is no doubt he fell out with other generals – Patton is most frequently highlighted – but in this he wasn’t alone. German generals often disagreed or instigated personal rivalries, while even Soviet marshals competed openly for Stalin’s favour. Their reasons usually stemmed from discussions over resources and strategy.

These officers were their generation’s military elite, possessing huge egos, and spending most of their time arguing why their section of the front was the most important and should receive the lion’s share of supplies, and why their military strategy was superior to that of their colleagues.

YET, MONTGOMERY WENT further. In addition to the above, he somehow managed to erode morale while almost undermining alliances with other Allied forces. Two examples illustrate this: first,

the Polish 1st Armoured Division was formed in Scotland in 1942 as part of the 200,000-strong Polish Armed Forces in the West and was assigned to Montgomery’s command in Normandy. The Poles lacked men and were happy to fill their ranks with ethnic Poles from captured German forces. During an inspection in the spring of 1944, Montgomery – whose informal manner and dress code irritated the decorous Polish officers – discovered that some of the force were German Poles who’d fought for the Afrika Korps under Rommel’s command. Montgomery enquired drily if they also spoke German to each other. Anglo-Polish relations were soured as a result.

Second, three weeks into the 1944 Ardennes Offensive, the US began to recover the situation and



Dwight D
Eisenhower.

**“HE CRITICISED MANY OF HIS
FORMER COLLEAGUES AND
DESTROYED RELATIONSHIPS”**



Montgomery in Berlin in July
1945, flanked by the Soviet
generals Zhukov (left) and
Rokossovsky (right).

slowly drive the Germans back. The northern part was under Montgomery's temporary command, and on 7th January 1945, he held a press conference. British troops had barely fired a shot during the campaign, but the assembled war correspondents heard how Montgomery – almost on his own – had saved the campaign and thus the offensive on the Western Front.

AFTER THE WAR, things got worse when Montgomery published his memoirs. Here, he managed to criticise most of his former colleagues and destroy many relationships, including with Eisenhower, by then president of the United States.

This occurred during the height of the Cold War. Schools carrying his name were changed to something less controversial, US cities revoked his honorary citizenship, and his reputation and legacy took a real battering. To make matters worse, Montgomery actively supported apartheid in South Africa and was ardently opposed to the legalisation of homosexuality in 1967, despite writing a collection of 'love letters' to a 13-year-old Swiss boy.

In short, Bernard Law Montgomery was a man whose final legacy revealed he learned little during his lifetime. Although he won all his campaigns, he was overly cautious and ponderous in most. Thanks to the Allies' numerical superiority, he could have taken a bolder approach without risk through more flexible operational plans that allowed for unexpected events.

WHAT CREATED A negative and questionable image of "Monty's" persona was his brusque and undiplomatic character. His autocratic and inflexible style was negatively reinforced through contemporary communiqués and press conferences, and, later, via Montgomery's own memoirs.

That's how the British warlord's image became controversial, and yet his efforts and methods during World War II can be summarised succinctly. After the war, British officer Basil Liddell Hart interviewed several German officers and asked them about Montgomery, among others. Two in particular summed up Montgomery in such a way as to aptly describe all his campaigns:

"I thought he was very cautious, considering his immensely superior strength, but [pause] he is the only Field Marshal in this war who won all his battles," said one, while General Günther Blumentritt commented, "Field Marshal Montgomery was very systematic. That is all right if you have sufficient forces, and sufficient time." ❖

Mathias Forsberg is a military history writer.



The legends' sons Manfred Rommel (left) and Bernard David Montgomery were friends who often met up.

Enemies' sons became good friends

★ One of Montgomery's professional regrets was that he never met his greatest rival, Erwin Rommel – so said Monty's son David Bernard Montgomery in interviews.

Montgomery never regarded Rommel as a Nazi but as a professional warlord who basically had much in common with himself.

Rommel was forced to commit suicide in October 1944, accused of taking part in a conspiracy against Hitler. His only son Manfred was then

15 years old and had to say goodbye to his father outside his office before Rommel was taken away in a car, where he took cyanide.

David Montgomery was the same age as Manfred – both were born in 1928 – while his father lived until 1976. The two sons first met in 1979 and became good friends. They visited each other and attended memorial services together until 2013, when Manfred Rommel died. David died in 2020.



Montgomery with his dogs: Hitler (left) and Rommel.

Derided general had unjust image

He regularly ends up in top ten lists of the worst generals in history. But the criticism of Arthur Percival, who lost Singapore to Japan in 1942, is not entirely fair.

Text: **ANDERS FAGER**

He didn't look very warlike. He was tall and scrawny, with protruding front teeth, which were accentuated by a small moustache. A friend described him as extremely intelligent, but unfortunately he didn't have "altogether an impressive presence". There was something a little ridiculous or awkward about Percival. At least, that's how history chose to portray him.

Arthur Ernest Percival was born on 26th December 1887 in Hertfordshire, north of London. His father was an estate manager, part of the middle classes that oiled the empire's wheels. Percival had an unexceptional education and after leaving school got a job at a company that traded in iron ore. When World War I broke out, he enlisted and was selected for officer training. After five weeks, he became acting second lieutenant, and had already been promoted to captain by the autumn of 1914.

PERCIVAL PARTICIPATED IN the Battle of the Somme, where he was seriously wounded and decorated with the Military Cross. He was described as a capable officer on the battlefield, brave and respected by his men. During World War I, he led both a battalion and a brigade. By the time the war ended, he held the rank of major.

Percival was deemed suitable to be trained as a staff officer. However, he instead volunteered for service with the British Military Mission in the Russian Civil War

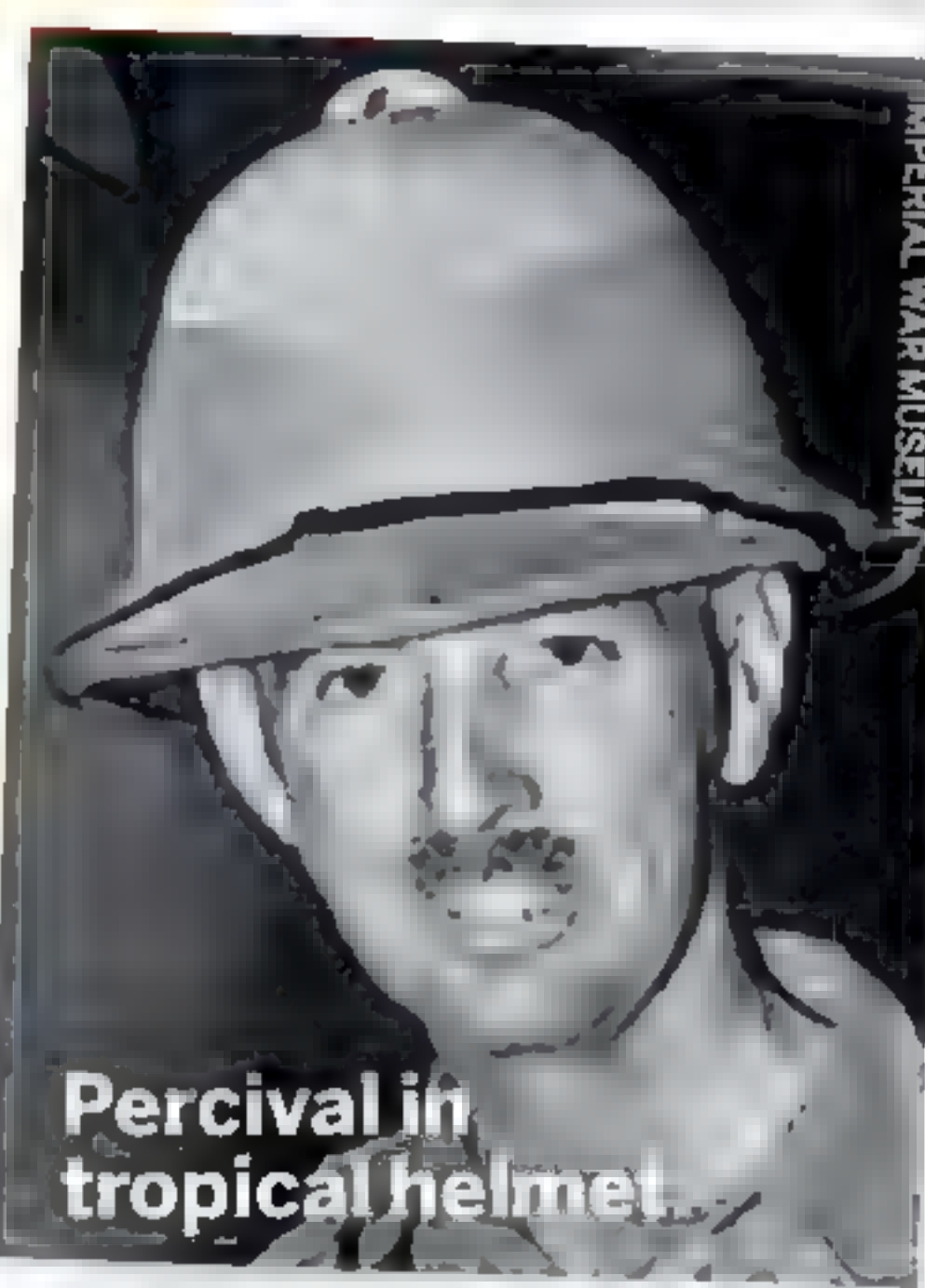
The British general Arthur Percival at the time of the Japanese attack on Singapore.

ARTHUR PERCIVAL

Lived: 1887–1966.

Role: Led the failed defence of Singapore against the Japanese in 1942.

Trivia: Said to have hated film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.



Percival in tropical helmet



Arthur Percival (far right) walks to the Japanese camp to surrender after the fighting in Singapore. 15th February 1942.

AP/RITZAU SCANPIX

and thereafter as an intelligence officer during the Irish War of Independence.

In Ireland's guerrilla warfare, the unassuming Percival was unexpectedly brutal. His unit soon became known as the "Essex Battalion Torture Squad", and he was said to be "viciously anti-Irish". There was a price on his head, but Churchill (Secretary of State for War at the time) and others saw him as an effective and uncompromising officer, and rewarded him with an OBE.

In 1923, Percival began his staff officer training and received excellent grades. He served in various posts in the British Empire as an instructor and staff officer. It was far from a meteoric career, more a slow plod as one of General John Dill's workhorses.

AS COLONEL, PERCIVAL served a year in Singapore, where he addressed the dangers of an attack from the north along the Malay Peninsula in a report, but no one was interested. Who'd attack the city from the north? Overland? No one knew then that Percival had sketched out a variation of the offensive that would defeat him five years later.

Although he seems to have requested it, Percival didn't have command of a troop, but was desk-bound for the first two years of World War II. It

"PERCIVAL DID NOT HAVE 'ALTOGETHER AN IMPRESSIVE PRESENCE'"

wasn't until April 1941 that Dill appointed him, at the age of 54, lieutenant-general and General Officer Commanding Malaya. For the first time, Percival was now head of an army corps.

IN A FREQUENTLY used photo of him, Percival has just arrived in Singapore. He looks absurdly thin and comical, with his big front teeth and huge tropical helmet, but it's worth questioning why he has come to be depicted by this particular picture.

When Percival arrived in the "Gibraltar of the Far East", Britain was focusing its war effort on North Africa. But its naval base was protected by massive coastal artillery batteries and there were almost 80,000 soldiers on the Malay Peninsula. Newsreels proclaimed that Singapore was prepared for all threats, plus the jungle in the north was impenetrable, and the British opinion of Japan was nothing less than racist. The fact that the Japanese had been fighting in China for almost ten years was nothing to worry about. Nor was the fact that they had a large modern fleet and an equally large



The Japanese landed on the Malay Peninsula's eastern side and advanced 800 km, the equivalent of Aberdeen to London. (Present-day borders.)



An Australian 2-pounder anti-tank gun temporarily halting the Japanese advance. In the background is an incapacitated Type 95 Ha-Go tank.

- and modern air force. (It should be noted that the Japanese were at least as racist as the British, and based much of their strategy on theories about the weak nature of white people.)

Percival soon realised he had to do something. There was more and more talk of war. The Japanese had just occupied French Indochina. The Indian, British and Australian units in the garrison were poorly trained and lacked both equipment and a sensible strategy. Moreover, the navy and air force had such different ideas about how war should be conducted that they would be unable to provide each other with any support. But Percival was not the man to force them to co-operate.



Tomoyuki Yamashita (1885–1946) skillfully led the attack on Singapore.

THE CAPTURE OF Southeast Asia during the winter of 1941 was Japan's main goal; the attack on Pearl Harbor was merely a diversion. General Yamashita, upon whom the task of capturing Singapore fell, was a very capable officer. He'd studied German ideology in China, and was fixated on speed and full of bold ideas. Unlike Percival, Yamashita knew exactly what he was doing. The offensive had been prepared for over a year.

One hour before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Yamashita landed at several points on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. He met strong opposition but secured a bridgehead, captured several airfields and began to deploy his own planes. Soon the Japanese had twice as many and significantly better aircraft in the region than the Allies.

On 10th December, Japanese aircraft sank the battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, which were searching for the Japanese invasion fleet,

without air support. The shock of the disaster was so great that the British almost missed the fact that Yamashita had gained total air supremacy over the Malay Peninsula and had started advancing the 800 kilometres to Singapore.

Yamashita's soldiers dragged food and ammunition with them on 12,000 bicycles in a kind of pedal-powered lightning war. 30,000 men attacked almost 100,000.

By the new year, the Japanese dominated the situation and Percival's troops withdrew. Churchill had ordered the army to fight to the last man, but didn't send Percival any reinforcements, and his own commanders were quarrelsome and obstructive. As the problems grew, the intellectual and uncharismatic Percival wasn't the right man to reckon with Churchill or his stubborn commanders.

This is not the place to describe every detail of Yamashita's well-planned and extremely well-executed offensive. But that's exactly what it was, and it also ruthlessly exploited decades of British blunders. But it wasn't a character flaw in Percival that led to his out-dated planes being annihilated by Japan's modern Zeros. Nor was he the one who spread the idea that the Japanese couldn't see anything when it rained, or made sure that there wasn't a single tank or hardly any anti-tank weapons on the Malay Peninsula.

YAMASHITA HAD 200 mediocre tanks, but they were better than none at all. (British tanks had been destined for Malaya, but Churchill sent them to the Soviet Union instead.) Percival had good artillery, but the Japanese went around his bases, through terrain that the British thought was impenetrable.

The simplest solution was to label Percival a lousy general. Modern analysis usually claims that Percival's biggest mistakes were that he didn't really believe in building fortifications and he should have fired his difficult subordinates.

He became the scapegoat for an incredible amount of British carelessness and arrogance. This suited

"THE JAPANESE WENT THROUGH TERRAIN THAT THE BRITISH THOUGHT WAS IMPENETRABLE"



JULIEN B. BRITZAU/SCAMP

Churchill just fine when it came to portraying the events in his history of World War II. The question is, however, whether any other general could have done anything different once Yamashita had landed and secured both naval and air supremacy.

ON THE LAST day of January 1942, Yamashita's troops reached the creeks around Singapore. Chaos and looting prevailed in the city. "There must at this stage be no thought of sparing the troops or population," thundered Churchill. "Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops."

Yamashita's offensive power was almost exhausted. He'd nearly run out of food and ammunition, and was afraid that Percival would realise that his army was close to collapse.

On 5th February, Yamashita launched a final attack and crossed the creeks around the city. It was a battle between two worn-out opponents, but Yamashita's men had Singapore in their sight and held out the longest.

Percival telegraphed: "Unable [to] continue the fight any longer. All ranks have done their best." Then, with a white flag, he went to negotiate with Yamashita. It's said that for a second Yamashita

thought that the British had come to demand that he give up. That was not the case.

Singapore surrendered on 15th February. Percival's first independent command had ended in disaster. He lost 120,000 men, most of them as prisoners. Yamashita lost just under ten thousand. According to Churchill, the surrender was "the worst disaster ... in British history" and it completely humiliated the colonial rulers of Southeast Asia.

PERCIVAL WAS HELD captive in Singapore, then transferred to a VIP camp in Manchuria, from where he was rescued by the OSS, a forerunner of the CIA. He attended the surrender of Japan and was also behind General MacArthur when he received Yamashita's surrender in the Philippines.

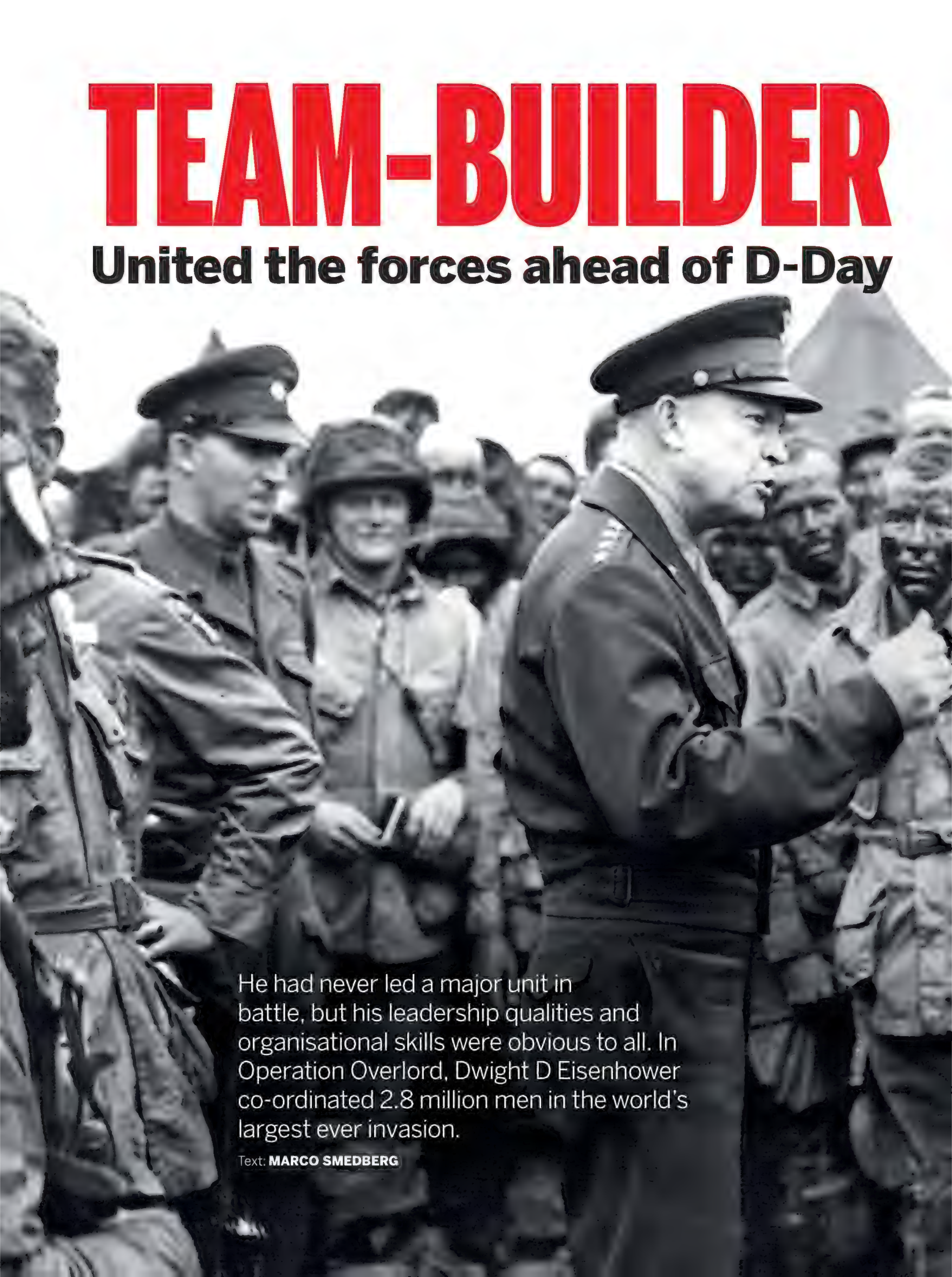
After the war, Percival was one of the few British lieutenant-generals not to be knighted. Instead, he was declared a fool and ridiculed. He wrote a short book about his failed campaign but it explained little. He also worked to gain compensation for former POWs. After the war, he lived a quiet life and died on 31 January 1966. 🇬🇧

Anders Fager is a reserve officer and author.

The Japanese troops advanced over difficult terrain. Here, engineer troops have built a bridge over a river and are supporting it while infantrymen cross. 26th January 1942.

TEAM-BUILDER

United the forces ahead of D-Day



He had never led a major unit in battle, but his leadership qualities and organisational skills were obvious to all. In Operation Overlord, Dwight D Eisenhower co-ordinated 2.8 million men in the world's largest ever invasion.

Text: **MARCO SMEDBERG**

EISENHOWER

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Eisenhower in conversation with US paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division ahead of D-Day.

The head of the German defence in Normandy, Field Marshal Rommel inspects landing obstacles on one of the beaches.



When the United States was drawn into World War II in 1941, President Roosevelt and the US military leadership decided fairly early on to adopt a ‘Germany first’ strategy. This

meant it was necessary to keep the Soviet Union in the war. A German victory on the Eastern Front would have made it almost impossible for a US war effort in Europe, because the Germans would have been able to gather strength in the west. Stalin also demanded a second front in western Europe to relieve his hard-pressed Soviet forces. The US believed this front had to be in France, to provide the shortest route to Berlin and victory.

Because the US was more powerful than Britain, the country was able to overrule Churchill and his advisers, who were worried about attacking the Germans in France. This was due to their bitter

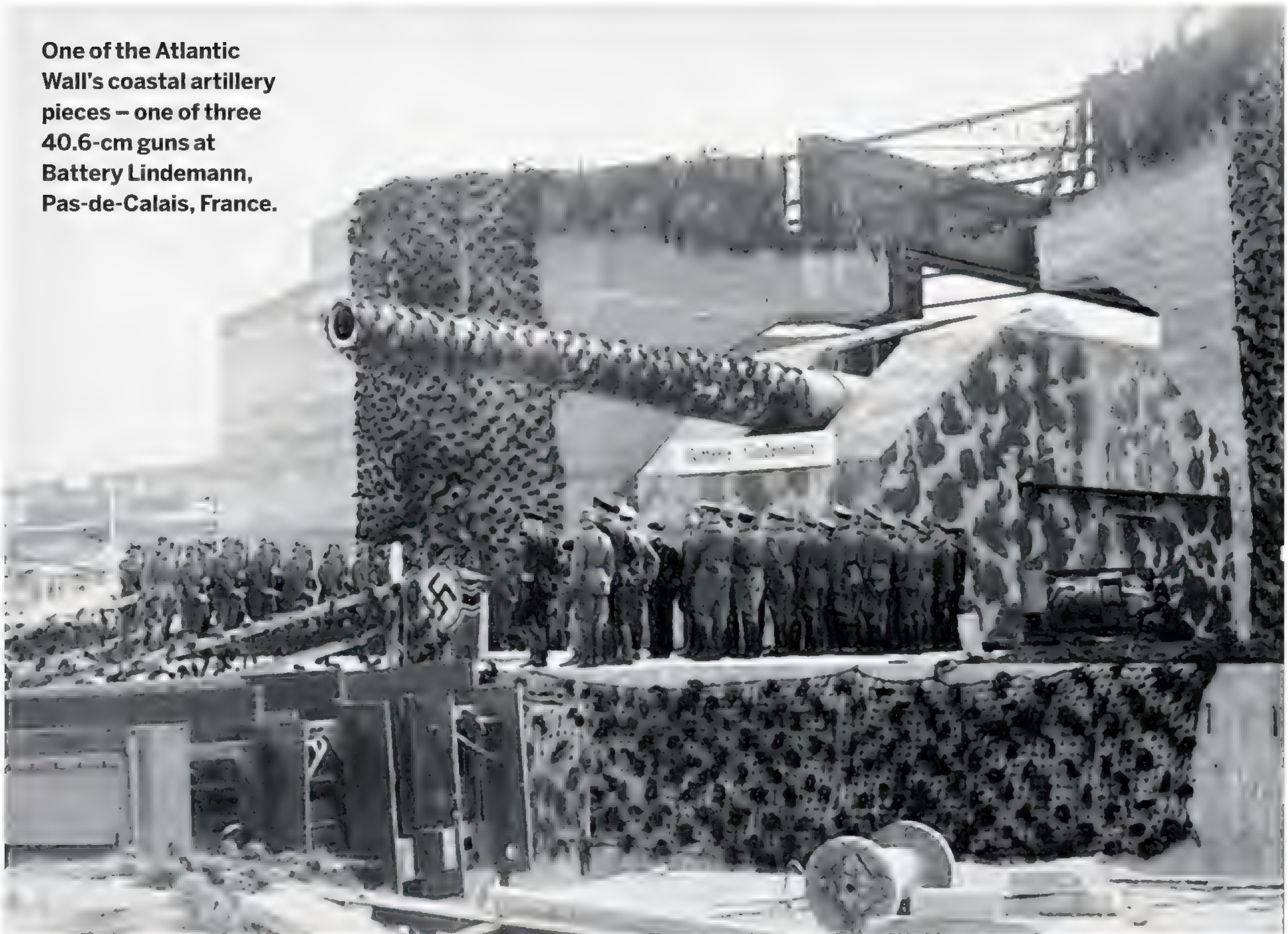
experience of fighting there during World War I. Also, attacks on a defended coast are one of the most complicated military operations possible – and it would take place on an unprecedented scale against the Germans’ Atlantic Wall. In many ways, therefore, the invasion of Normandy was a critical point in the war.

IN NOVEMBER 1943, Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill met in Tehran, where it was finally decided that the western Allies would invade France in the early summer of 1944, and at the same time, the Soviet Union would stage a major offensive on the Eastern Front to tie up German resources. On his way home from this meeting, Roosevelt made a stopover in Tunis, where he took the opportunity to appoint General Dwight D “Ike” Eisenhower as commander of Operation Overlord (the code name for the forthcoming invasion). Eisenhower was commander of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean region, where US forces had landed in North Africa a year earlier.

Some planning for the invasion had already been done and this work was now taken over by Eisenhower, who created a new staff to prepare and lead the invasion. His Supreme Headquarters

**“IN MANY WAYS, THE
INVASION OF NORMANDY WAS
A CRITICAL POINT IN THE WAR”**

One of the Atlantic Wall's coastal artillery pieces – one of three 40.6-cm guns at Battery Lindemann, Pas-de-Calais, France.



BUNDESARCHIV, BILD 1011-364 2314 16A/KUHN/CC BY SA 3.0

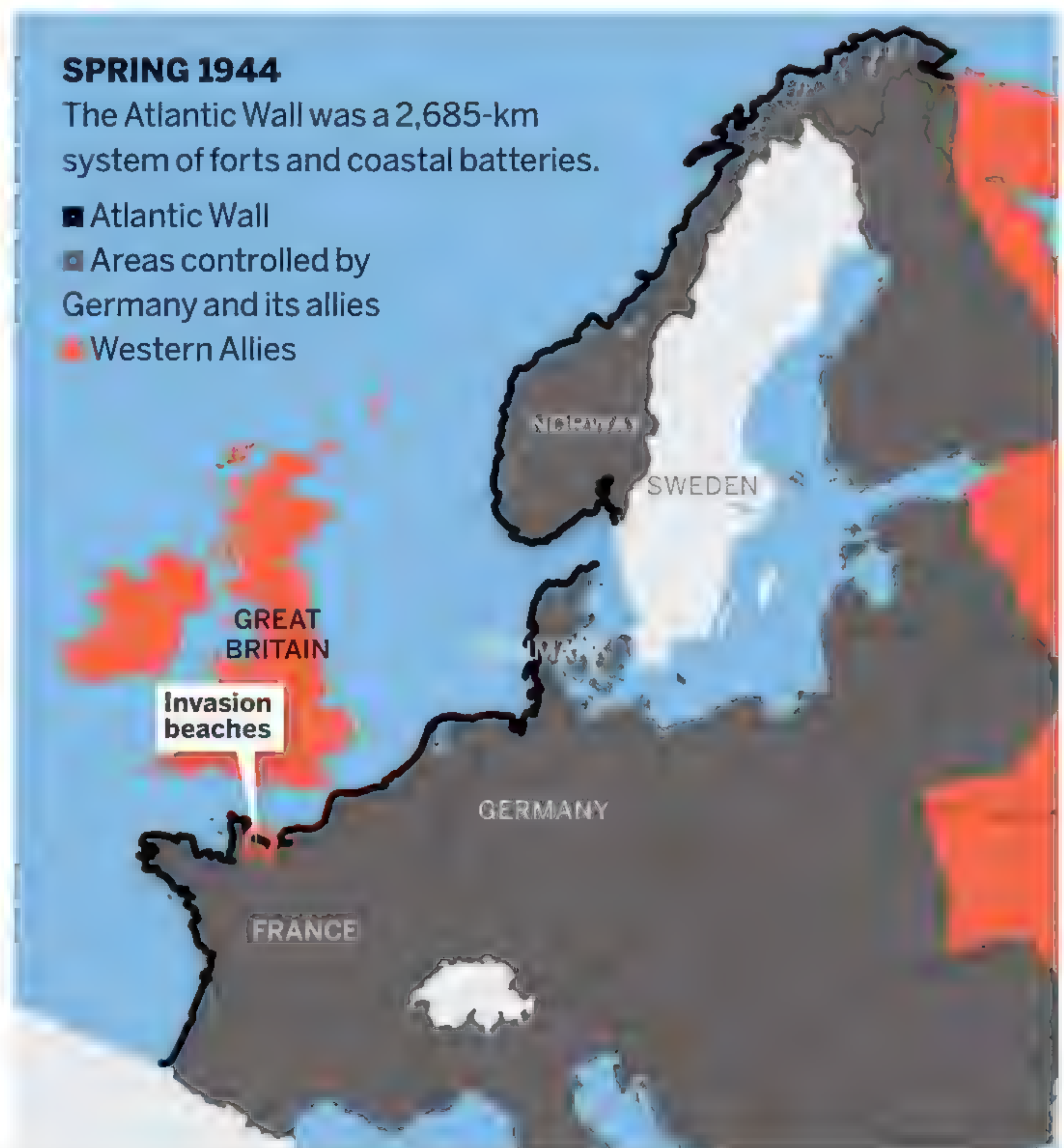
Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was set up in a military camp in west London in December 1943 (see organisational diagram over the page).

After a brief visit to the United States, Eisenhower arrived at SHAEF in mid-January 1944. His rather wide-ranging role was to bring about an invasion in western Europe and then, in co-operation with other Allied nations, to reach central Germany and destroy its military.

Eisenhower's chief of staff was US General Walter Bedell Smith. He had held the same position under Eisenhower in North Africa and had the full confidence of his boss. Bedell Smith was brusque and not very well liked by his colleagues, but was a skilled administrator and was also responsible for who got to meet Eisenhower and when.

WHILE EISENHOWER WAS an American, other principal posts were held by Brits. Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, for instance, was appointed Eisenhower's deputy. He had successfully led the Allied air force in North Africa and in the ensuing campaign in Italy in the autumn of 1943, and had worked well with Eisenhower. Another good team player was Admiral Bertram Ramsay, who was

Article continues on page 82 ►



CHRISTOPHER REHN

Eisenhower was a spider in a web

Eisenhower sat in the centre of a network of leaders who controlled different parts of the huge operation. This is what D-Day's leadership structure looked like.



Winston Churchill
Prime minister and minister of defence



Combined Chiefs

Chiefs of Staff Committee

Alan Brooke
British Army



Andrew Cunningham
Royal Navy



Charles Portal
Royal Air Force

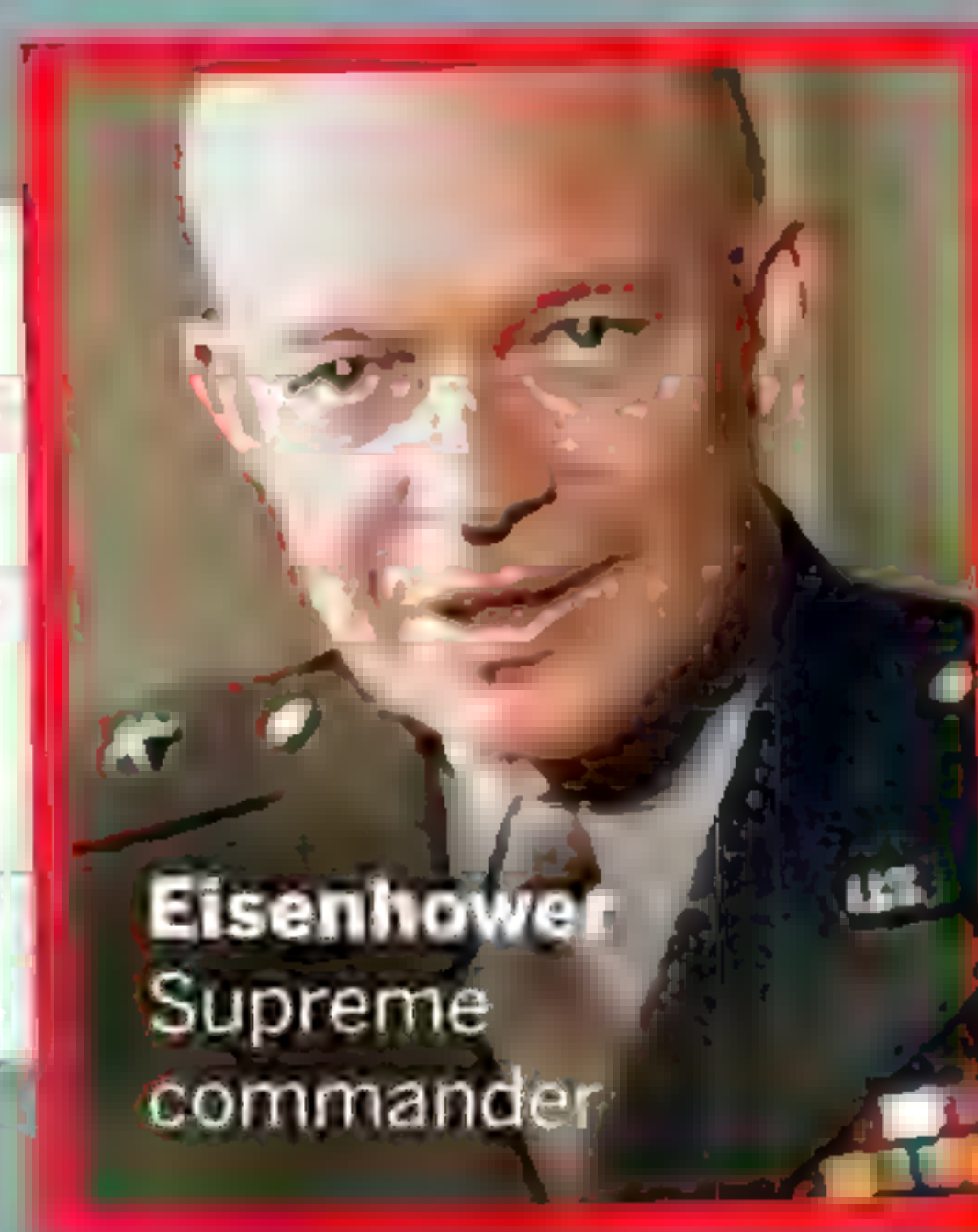


= Invasion beach

= German battery

2 Eisenhower's staff prepared goals and guidelines for the invasion.

3 His commanders drew up the detailed plans.



Supreme Headquarters

Arthur Tedder
Deputy commander



Bertram Ramsay
Allied Naval Expeditionary Force



Bernard Law Montgomery
21st Army Group



Trafford Leigh-Mallory
Allied Expeditionary Air Force

Western Task Force

Eastern Task Force

Omar Bradley
First US Army



Miles Dempsey
British Second Army



British Second Tactical Air Force

VII Corps

V Corps

Utah Beach

Omaha Beach

BARBENTON

LAVERNE

1 The Allied leadership decided that an invasion would happen in France.



Franklin D Roosevelt
President and commander-in-chief



of Staff

Joint Chief of Staff

William Leahy
Chairman



George Marshall
US Army



Ernest King
US Navy



Henry Arnold
US Army
Air Force



COH evaluated previous invasions, kept track of new technology and developed fresh tactics.

Allied Expeditionary Force

Walter Bedell Smith
Chief of staff

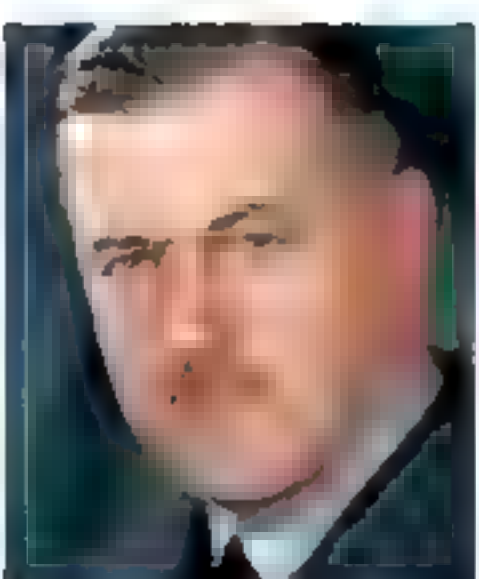


Frederick Morgan
Deputy chief of staff



Combined Operations Headquarters

Robert Laycock
Chief of staff



US Ninth
Air Force

Carl Spaatz
US Strategic
Air Forces
in Europe



Arthur Harris
Royal Air
Force Bomber
Command



Bombers were deployed during the operation.

I Corps

XXX Corps

Gold Beach

Juno Beach

Sword Beach

LE HAVRE

GRAPHICS: CHRISTOFFER REHN
SATELLITE IMAGE: GOOGLE

PHOTOS: IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM
DUTCH NATIONAL ARCHIVES
US AIR FORCE
US NAVY
US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
US WAR DEPARTMENT
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

Ike's leadership qualities were discovered early on

★ Eisenhower was born in 1890 in Denison, Texas. He began his military training in 1911 and was appointed second lieutenant in 1915. As a young officer during World War I, "Ike" served in various training facilities in the US tank corps. He didn't see active combat, but his organisational skills and leadership qualities were noted.

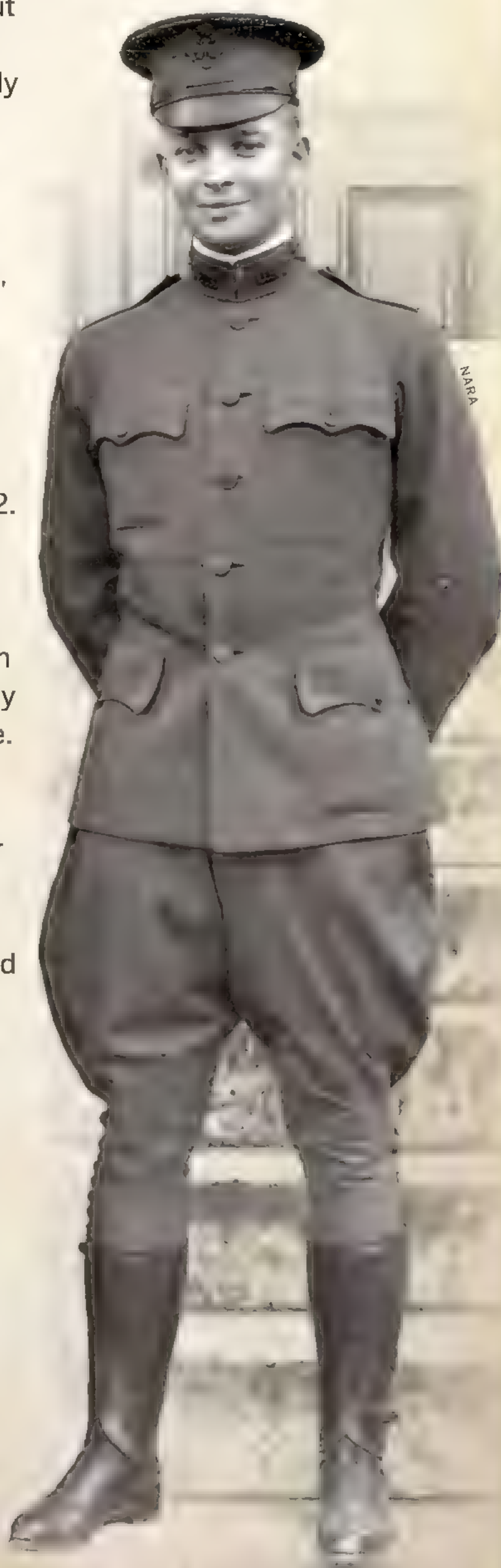
When World War II broke out in 1939, Eisenhower had still not led a major unit. As a newly appointed brigadier general, he served in Washington, developing war plans.

He was held in high esteem among the US war leadership, which led to Eisenhower being appointed commander of Allied operations in the Mediterranean and leading the US landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942. These experiences came in useful when he led Operation Overlord. The invasion was successful and his forces then fought the Battle of Normandy and liberated Western Europe. In recognition of his success, Eisenhower was appointed five-star general in December 1944, the US equivalent of a field marshal.

When Germany surrendered in May 1945, Eisenhower was appointed commander of the US occupation zone.

In 1950-52, he was head of NATO, before the popular war hero entered politics as a Republican candidate

and won the US presidential election in 1952. He was most interested in foreign policy and the Cold War, but – impressed by the German autobahns – Eisenhower invested in an extensive expansion of the US road network. He was re-elected in 1956 and left office in January 1961 when President Kennedy took over. He died in 1969.



Dwight D Eisenhower in 1916. During World War I, he served in various training facilities.

► appointed commander of naval forces for Operation Overlord. By May 1940, he'd successfully led the evacuation of Dunkirk.

More difficult to work with for many – but not Eisenhower – was the commander of RAF Fighter Command, Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, who now became commander of the Allied air forces that would support the invasion.

Perhaps the most troublesome of the Allied commanders was General Bernard Law Montgomery. He became commander of the invasion ground forces, which consisted of the US First Army under Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, and the British Second Army under Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey. These two armies formed Montgomery's 21st Army Group. Towards British and US officer colleagues, "Monty" was often condescending and always put his own needs first. But he got results. It was he who stopped the German Africa Korps and forced it to retreat. Montgomery was also well regarded by his soldiers, who knew he made the effort to ensure they were properly prepared before sending them into battle. Although Eisenhower had no close relationship with Montgomery, their collaboration worked.

ANOTHER COLLABORATOR WITH a difficult reputation was the commander of the Free French Forces, General Charles de Gaulle. But Eisenhower, who met De Gaulle in North Africa, got on well with him. De Gaulle led the resistance movement in France and Eisenhower wanted to secure its support. De Gaulle promised Eisenhower that the Free French Forces would take part in the invasion and look after the civilian administration in French territories as they were liberated. Should the Allies get that far, Eisenhower promised de Gaulle that the French themselves would be able to liberate Paris.

The Allies were then able to draw upon the help of the resistance movement, which sent numerous radio messages and written reports on German positions. In addition, the railways, telephone network and bridges that the Germans relied on were sabotaged. However, the Allies knew that the Germans sometimes succeeded in infiltrating local resistance groups. The risk of leaks therefore meant that Eisenhower couldn't fully control the resistance movement's efforts or reveal when and where the invasion would take place.

Eisenhower also maintained a good relationship with Churchill. The British prime minister had plenty of strong views and opinions but, without risking their friendship or mutual respect, Eisenhower was able to argue with Churchill when he felt he was wrong – which was often.

During World War I, Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, had been the driving force behind



Eisenhower (centre) plans the invasion with the D-Day commanders in February 1944. From left: Omar Bradley, Bertram Ramsay, Arthur Tedder, Bernard Montgomery, Trafford Leigh-Mallory and Walter Bedell Smith.

the British offensive against the Turks at Gallipoli in 1915. The failed operation led to heavy losses and retreats, and Churchill was forced to resign. These memories contributed to Churchill now being extra cautious about Overlord. At a lunch with Eisenhower, Churchill expressed his concerns but ended by saying: “I am in this thing with you to the end and if it fails we will go down together.”

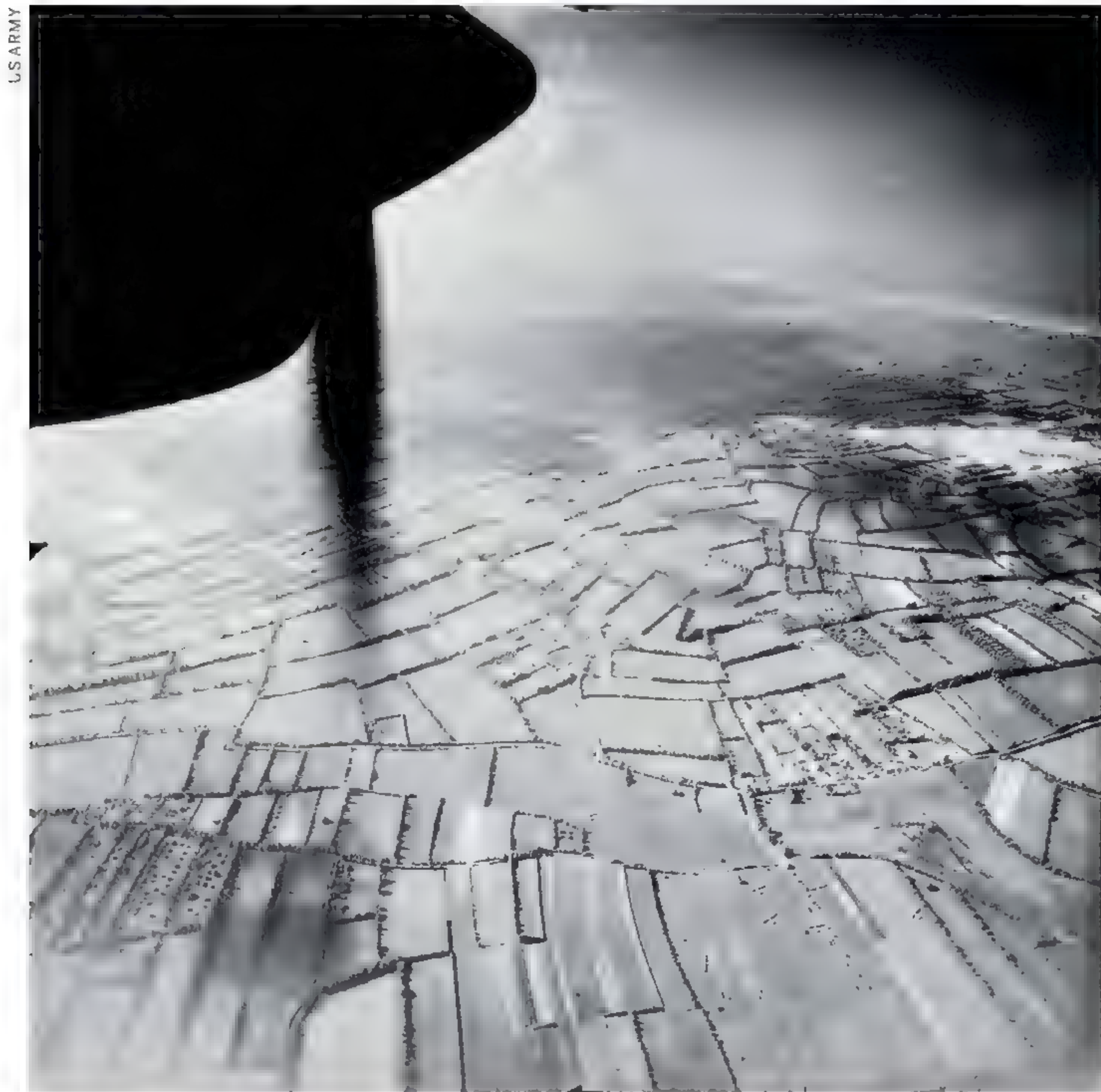
PLANNING THE INVASION was an enormous challenge that required a lot of work, and many different staffs were involved. Admiral Ramsay’s and Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory’s staffs were part of SHAEF but not grouped with Eisenhower, while Montgomery’s Army Group staff was based in London. So, in the military hierarchy, each lower-ranking commander had his own staff. Ancillary staffs were also used in the planning, such as the British Combined Operation Headquarters, which included US officers. Its staff had originally been set up to develop amphibious warfare and write manuals for that type of combat.

The workload and time pressures were considerable for the personnel of the various staffs, partly due to the fact that their heads were appointed relatively late. The role of Eisenhower and his chief of staff was to set goals and try to get

“EISENHOWER MANAGED TO ACHIEVE THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY AND CO-ORDINATION”

the whole military bureaucracy in order, while different specialists worked within their own spheres. The staff could study, analyse and suggest, but they couldn’t act. The actual implementation of the plan rested on the various commanders. Overall, Eisenhower and his chief of staff still managed to achieve the necessary authority and co-ordination.

AT THE END of January 1944, the decision was made to deploy more units and thereby expand the invasion. According to the plan, five divisions in total would now land. The selected landing beaches consisted of two US ones – Utah (furthest west) and Omaha – and three British ones: Gold, Juno and Sword. US troops ended up in the far west because, if the invasion were successful, they would be able to unload US ships directly in French ports rather than go via Britain. The flanks of the invasion area would be protected by two US airborne divisions, to be deployed west of Utah, ►



A photo taken from an F-5 Lightning reconnaissance aircraft during Operation Overlord shows a field with Allied gliders on the ground.

- and a British airborne division, east of Sword. In order to obtain enough intelligence about the beach defences, air reconnaissance had to be increased. Until then, aerial photography had only been used in Normandy, but this was immediately changed to cover virtually the entire Atlantic coast, so as not to risk revealing which areas the Allies were really interested in.

THE NEXT CRITICAL question was when the invasion should take place, which required consideration of a number of contradictory factors. The landing craft required a high tide. An early invasion would mean that the exposed soldiers would have to attack over a wide-open shore, while a late disembarkation carried the risk of the landing craft being blown up or smashing against German obstacles at the water's edge. It was best to disembark on an incoming tide, which, after the soldiers had left the vessels, would continue to rise and free the landing craft, which could then turn around and retrieve the units for the next wave of attack from the larger transport vessels waiting further out at sea.

The fleet required daylight to be able to carry out the necessary coastal combat, which also applied to bombing and attack flights. At the same time, they wanted to try to hide the transports under cover of darkness, which meant invading in the

"IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO PARACHUTE IN TOO STRONG A WIND"

early morning. This meant that the air landings, which needed to take place a few hours before the landings, so they could disrupt German defences, had to take place in the dark. The air force was happy for the flights to France to happen at night, but required moonlight for the parachute drops. The combination of rising tides and full moon was best during the period 5th–7th June. After then, it would be a long time before the same favourable conditions returned. On top of that, the weather had to be right. It was impossible to parachute in too strong a wind or land from small vessels in too rough a sea. All things considered, it was finally decided that the invasion would take place on 5th June.

Normandy was chosen as the landing site for several reasons. The Netherlands or Belgium would have been closer to Germany but the beaches were worse. The obvious landing site around Calais was closest to Britain but it was well defended. The prime port of Le Havre was located further south, at the mouth of the river Seine, but the city was also heavily fortified, plus any Allied forces taking part in a later advance towards Paris would risk being split in two by the River Seine.

Further south in Brittany, there were several good ports, but it would take longer to get there for both fighter aircraft and air defence, and for the smaller landing craft. In addition, access to vital landing equipment was critical, with a constant tug of war over resources between Normandy, the Mediterranean and the Pacific. As a consequence of this shortage, the planned invasion of the south of France, Operation Dragoon, was postponed. It was originally intended to relieve operations in Normandy by tying up German resources, but wasn't carried out until August 1944.

THE ALLIES TOOK great care to try to mislead the Germans. In Operation Fortitude South, extensive work was done around Dover, directly across the Channel from Calais, to give the appearance of a phantom US army group. With the help of fake targets in the form of sham barracks, parking areas with dummy vehicles and extensive bogus radio traffic, the Allies hoped to make the Germans believe that the invasion would take place on the French coast where it was closest to Britain. They also made sure to have genuine columns of vehicles move around the area. More mock targets were built in the form of landing craft made out of wood and ►

The preparations for D-Day were extensive. Here, US trucks are driven aboard an LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) in Weymouth, UK, in early June 1944.



DWIGHT D EISENHOWER



A 'plane' made of wood and cloth that would trick the Germans into thinking the Allies were preparing to invade elsewhere.



An inflatable 'Sherman tank', installed in a field somewhere in the UK.

- ▶ canvas on old oil barrels. A large new jetty was even built in Dover.

Because captured German spies were forced to act as double agents, the Germans were also fed false information. This created an exaggerated picture of the number of operational Allied divisions, including several false air invasion divisions.

To further reinforce the image of this threat, General George Patton was used as a decoy. He was one of the Allies' most skilled generals and had reaped success during the campaigns in North Africa and Sicily using bold tactics. But after an incident in Sicily when he struck a soldier on sick leave and accused him of cowardice, Eisenhower had deprived him of his command as army chief. The Allies knew that Patton was the general the Germans were most impressed by. To take advantage of this and have him on hand for later command, in the spring of 1944 Eisenhower had Patton act as commander of the First US Army Group – which didn't exist.

Patton, who longed for a genuine new command and was dependent on Eisenhower's goodwill, played his role loyally and well. He went around inspecting units during exercises and giving speeches in which he indicated where his troops would land in France.



General Patton had to act as commander of an army group that didn't exist, all to mislead the Germans.

THE DECEPTION WORKED because it backed up what the Germans already believed. And the Allies' efforts were vindicated once the genuine landings took place and the Germans continued to wait for an invasion around Calais. The Germans initially considered the Normandy landings to be a diversionary tactic, and this fact delayed the necessary regroupings of their units to Normandy.

The Allies also carried out a sham manoeuvre in Scotland: Operation Fortitude North. With the help of another phantom army, an attempt was made to create the impression of a threat to Norway and

the important German submarine bases there. The Allies increased their agents' activities in Norway and began collecting information as a basis for a future invasion. Activity in Sweden was also increased, with discreet inquiries and surveys of road networks, bridges and airports, all with the aim of creating the illusion of forthcoming operations in Scandinavia. German reconnaissance aircraft were also allowed to photograph the Allies' fake targets.

However, these efforts failed to deceive the Germans, who took no special measures to increase their defences in Norway. Although there were a lot of German units in the country, they were mostly stationary occupation and local defence forces, rather than mobile field units.

IN THIS CONTEXT, what each side knew about the other's dispositions played a big role. Both sides listened to each other's radio traffic but the Allies had an advantage. The Germans believed that their Enigma machine's code couldn't be cracked. Gradually, however, the British managed to decipher it and the Allies could read all German encrypted radio traffic thanks to Operation Ultra.

As the Wehrmacht used Enigma in its daily reports from every major army and Luftwaffe unit, plus individual ships and U-boats, the Allies gained an excellent insight into their opponents' dispositions. But it was one thing to know where the Germans were, it was another to understand whether they were deceived or were hiding something themselves.

It was also important not to reveal what the Allies knew, and they put a lot of effort into concealing this. Intelligence was restricted to the highest Allied leaders and, on several occasions, they even refrained from using their knowledge, resulting in their own losses. This was to avoid the risk of the Germans suspecting something – which they never did.

A crucial reason why the Germans doubted that Normandy was the genuine target of an invasion

“THE DECEPTION WORKED BECAUSE IT BACKED UP WHAT THE GERMANS ALREADY BELIEVED”

was that there were no decent ports in the region, which would be necessary to maintain the enemy units in the long run. The ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre were several miles outside the area and well defended.

THE ALLIES SOLVED this problem with new technology, constructing two floating “Mulberry” ports. Once the bridgehead was secured, they would be towed over to Normandy. The harbours consisted of 213 floating hollow concrete blocks, which, once in place, would be filled with water so that they rested on the seabed and protruded several metres above the surface. In this way a breakwater would be formed. Within this, various jetties would be anchored, from which roadways resting on floating pontoons would lead inland. This would allow

Air Marshal Tedder, Eisenhower and General Montgomery (in berets) watch tank exercises before D-Day. February 1944.

trucks to drive off the ships and further inland, regardless of the tide. This innovative harbour project consisted of a total of 55 merchant ships and about ten warships. The problem of fuel supply was solved with the help of oil pipelines known as Pipe-Line Under The Ocean (PLUTO), which were to be laid on the seabed between Southern England and Normandy.

OTHER INNOVATIONS INCLUDED various special armoured vehicles intended for tasks such as overcoming obstacles, demolishing bunkers and clearing mines. These so-called “Hobart’s Funnies” were named after the British commander who developed them. The more sceptical US forces refused to use them on the grounds that they didn’t have time to train and practise with the vehicles, which later put them at a disadvantage during the fighting on the beaches, because they were unable to draw on the vehicles’ merits.

Despite their shortcomings, the German units that the Allies were due to face were still formidable opponents. The Germans’ major challenge was that they didn’t know where or when the invasion would take place, and their opportunities to obtain information were small. The Nazis had only a ►



The Mulberry floating harbour was set up at Gold Beach and protected by anti-aircraft guns.



MIRROPPIX/GETTY

- few spies operating in Britain and they were eventually exposed.

Signals reconnaissance also yielded no results as long as the Allies observed radio silence, and German air reconnaissance over Britain was virtually impossible due to the effective Allied air defence. When the Germans lost the Battle of the Atlantic, their ability to make reliable weather forecasts also deteriorated.

THE GERMANS' ADVANTAGE in being numerically superior in an Allied invasion was outweighed by the fact that they had to spread their resources. The Germans had 42 infantry divisions and nine armoured divisions of varying quality for the defence of Western Europe. Many of the infantry forces were training units or had low mobility and combat value.

The combat value of armoured units also varied as several had recently arrived in France from the Eastern Front to recover and be replenished with new men and equipment. In France, the High Commander in the West was 69-year-old Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. Convinced that the

Germans would initially be unable to defeat the Allied invasion, he wanted, in typical German manner, to gather the armoured reserves and try to defeat the enemy via a series of major counter-attacks.

In November 1943, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel became inspector of the German Atlantic Wall, and two months later was appointed commander of Army Group B and the defence of Normandy. Rommel energetically devoted himself to strengthening the neglected coastal defences. Extensive mines were laid along the coast and obstacles to protect against landing craft were built on the shore in the form of mined gate-like steel defences. Further inland, poles were knocked into possible air landing sites to impale paratroopers and prevent gliders from landing. Concrete artillery positions and bases were also built, especially around the main ports. But his resources were limited and the shortcomings large. The coastal artillery was of varying quality and the concrete barriers were, in many cases, not good enough to withstand shelling from ships.

DURING THE BATTLES in North Africa, Rommel had experienced the devastating effect of Allied



Erwin Rommel wanted to spread the armoured units out along the coast.

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aviation. He was convinced that it was no longer possible to move armoured units in daylight if the enemy had air supremacy. He now advocated that it was necessary to abandon the idea of aggressive counter-attacks and instead spread the armoured units out along the coast. In this way, Rommel hoped that these scattered and therefore weakened armoured units would still be able to stop the Allied troops as they landed, before they had time to build up in strength. In this scenario, the threat to German tanks also came from enemy ship artillery. During the Allied landings in Sicily in July 1943, various German views on how to use armoured units had been discussed and then tested in combat.

The final decision on how the armoured units should be positioned and used was made by Hitler, with an unfortunate compromise. Some armoured divisions were positioned forward, but not as close to the coast as Rommel wanted, while the rest were part of Panzer Group West under the command of General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg. But that armoured force couldn't be deployed without Hitler's consent. The Führer's decision didn't satisfy any of the German commanders.

FROM AN ALLIED perspective, the Normandy landings were a frontal attack on a defended coast, with no opportunity to go around and encircle the enemy, which required air superiority. The Allies also needed to capture bridges and road junctions before the invasion, to make it more difficult for the Germans to bring in reserves. In order not to reveal where the landings would take place, this air combat needed to take place over a large area. The Allies had, with great difficulty, developed strategies for this type of air warfare in North Africa and Italy.

These experiences would now come in useful, but the question of how the air power would be used turned out to be one of Eisenhower's biggest problems. While the landing forces' exercises were in full swing in the spring of 1944, the air war intensified over Germany. The commanders of US and British strategic bombing were known as the "air barons" and they thought they had the upper hand. While British bombers attacked cities at night, US bombers tried to precision-bomb various key industries during daylight, and these two actions together were considered enough to paralyse the German war effort. The air barons believed that the invasion was unnecessary and that their bombers could win the war on their own.

They were wrong. German industry was not affected to the extent that the Allies had hoped, and their own losses of aircraft and men were considerable. But one effect of the air war was that German fighter jets were ground down in their attempts to stop the bombings, and by the spring of

"HE WANTED TO TRY TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY IN MAJOR COUNTER-ATTACKS"

1944, the Allies had thus achieved air supremacy over France. But with regard to supporting the invasion with heavy bombing, opinions differed. The main representatives of the bombers, British Air Marshal Arthur "Bomber" Harris and US General Carl Spaatz, didn't want to engage in a sideshow in France before the invasion, but wanted to continue attacking Germany in what they considered a crucial stage in the air war.

TO PROVIDE AIR support, Eisenhower had two tactical air forces at his disposal, but he also demanded to be allowed to use heavy bombers. This became a hotly contested issue. When the air barons didn't meet with him, Eisenhower took the issue to the highest level. While President Roosevelt and his chief of staff, General George Marshall, supported Eisenhower, Churchill supported the bombers. General Patton happened to be present when Eisenhower spoke on the phone with his deputy, Air Marshal Tedder, saying: "I am tired of dealing with a lot of prima donnas. By God, you tell that bunch that if they can't get together and stop quarrelling like children, I will tell the prime minister to get someone else to run this damn war." Patton was impressed, especially as Eisenhower had struck a blow and made Churchill change his mind.

Eisenhower gained control of the air power two months before the invasion. Air Marshal Tedder ►



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Von Rundstedt wanted to gather the armoured reserves and defeat the Allies in substantial counter-offensives.



HISTORIEARKIV

German soldiers with an MG 34 machine gun ready to fire during Operation Overlord. It has a tripod and an MGZ 34 telescopic sight.

DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

► ensured that the bombers attacked the French railway network to make it harder for the Germans to transport troops and equipment. As a consequence of this bombing attack, compared to January 1944, rail traffic fell to 69 percent in May, and 38 percent on the day of the invasion. The bombings also claimed some twelve thousand French civilian lives, which was significantly fewer than the Allies had feared. It was the only time Eisenhower threatened to resign. Long after the war, he was asked what had been his biggest contribution to the success of the invasion and he explained that it was his insistence on the bombing of transportation.

DESPITE HIS WORKLOAD, Eisenhower also spent considerable time visiting the units that were practising around the south-east of England. He was well aware that the success of the coming invasion would largely be due to the ability of individual soldiers to fight and take risks. If the paratroopers and the first troops to land dared to attack the German defences, the invasion had a good chance of success. If, instead, they only sought shelter and allowed themselves to be stopped, the invasion could very well fail.

That is why, between February and June, Eisenhower visited 26 divisions, 22 airfields, five warships and many depots and other installations. Everywhere, he gave short speeches, talked to individual soldiers and sailors, and shook their hands. Eisenhower was masterful at engaging people and was happy to ask where they came from in order to strike up a conversation.

On 15th May, General Montgomery held a carefully rehearsed review of the entire forthcoming invasion for all the leaders involved, as well as Churchill and King George VI. Montgomery showed remarkable

“EVERYWHERE, HE GAVE SHORT SPEECHES AND TALKED TO SOLDIERS”

optimism. His staff had analysed and tested every conceivable difficulty and, overall, Montgomery felt that victory was pretty much assured. He also confidently believed that his troops would capture the strategic town of Caen in the middle of the invasion area on the first day of the landings.

OTHERS WERE LESS optimistic, including British chief of staff Field Marshal Alan Brooke. He was Churchill's military adviser, and was critical of Eisenhower as commander. He would have preferred General Marshall to lead the invasion, but that wasn't possible, because President Roosevelt refused to free up his chief of staff, and kept Marshall in Washington. In his diary, Brooke described Eisenhower as: “Just a co-ordinator ... a champion of inter-Allied co-operation ... But is that enough?” However, Churchill, who was also worried, announced after encouragement from Eisenhower: “I am hardening to this enterprise.”

Fresh problems constantly arose and had to be addressed. On 29th May, the commander of Eisenhower's air force, Leigh-Mallory, wrote to Eisenhower, warning that reconnaissance reports indicated that the Germans were strengthening their defences in the airfields that the US Air Force intended to use. Leigh-Mallory warned that the losses could therefore be too great, and suggested that the United States should refrain from making air landings. To make his point, he also visited Eisenhower the next day to personally warn him that, in his estimation, the US losses could be as great as 70 percent.

Eisenhower knew that Bradley's First Army, which was to land in Utah and Omaha, would be relying on this flank protection. After weighing up the alternatives, he called and gave the message that the air landings would still go ahead. The men had been given a difficult task, but it was necessary that it be carried out.

On 2nd June, Eisenhower relocated from London to Portsmouth on the south coast, where SHAEF established a temporary headquarters for him along with Admiral Ramsay's staff. Meanwhile, the roads on the south coast were packed with endless columns of vehicles as the units began to board the ships that would take them to France. The huge loading operation went according to plan. As the ►

Eisenhower chats to paratroopers from the US 101st Airborne Division before boarding the plane that will take them to Normandy.



US A-20 Havocs bomb the battery on the Pointe du Hoc cliff before D-Day.

Operation Overlord in numbers

★ The invasion of Normandy, Operation Overlord, was an enormous undertaking. The workforce, including all ground, sea and air units, totalled 2.8 million men, which required a huge amount of organisation. In January 1944, the SHAEF staff numbered around 600 officers and 900 men, half of whom were American and half British. This included Admiral Ramsay's naval staff and Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory's flight staff.

Shipments and maintenance transports required just over five

thousand vessels and landing craft, while one thousand warships were responsible for coastal shelling, escorts, mine laying and mine clearing. Seven hundred smaller vessels were also used.

However, the heavy artillery component was comparatively weak, with only six older battleships, fewer than at other Allied landings in the Mediterranean and the Pacific.

The ships were manned by 65,000 sailors and transported 150,000 soldiers, 2,000 tanks and 12,000 other

vehicles across the English Channel to the Normandy beaches.

The invasion forces also included men from Canada, Poland, France and the Netherlands, plus ten ship crews and about 20 pilots from Norway.

On the first day, 23,000 men were air-landed, then 58,000 US and 72,000 British, Canadian, French and Dutch troops broke through the Atlantic Wall on 6th June 1944.

It is unlikely that an invasion of such magnitude will ever be carried out again.

Soldiers and vehicles pour from the ships at Omaha Beach on one of the first days.

DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

- ships were filled and the cargo strapped down, they left the harbour jetties and anchored out in the shipyard to make room for other ships waiting to be loaded.

At this crucial stage, the weather was the biggest problem. After a period of good conditions in May, there was an increase in low pressure in the Atlantic. In his diary, Eisenhower wrote that the weather was “practically unpredictable” and he knew that if it got worse, several of his colleagues would suggest that the invasion be postponed. This would mean several weeks of delay and nervous waiting, which in turn could affect the units’ morale. Should the Germans in the meantime also succeed in figuring out where the invasion would take place and strengthen their defences, the risk of failure would increase. The responsibility weighed heavily on Eisenhower.

IT DIDN’T LOOK good when meteorologists predicted bad weather for the 4th, 5th and maybe the 6th of June. On the evening of 3rd June, Eisenhower had a discussion with his chief meteorologist, Group Captain John Stagg of the Royal Air Force. The weather forecast for 5th June was poor due to an approaching storm. Eisenhower decided to postpone his decision until the next morning. Meanwhile, ships carrying US units to Utah and Omaha had to start their voyage because they had the longest distance to travel. Eisenhower decided to let the ships set off but be prepared for a late decision to cancel and return.

At 04.30 the following morning, Eisenhower and his immediate superiors held another meeting. It was raining and windy outside the staff building. Stagg thought the weather was too bad to go ahead. It was almost storm conditions, with a wind speed of 15 metres per second, and the low cloud would complicate all flight operations. Admiral Ramsay believed that the navy could still complete its part in the manoeuvre and remained neutral as to whether to launch or postpone the invasion. Montgomery

thought they should begin anyway, while Tedder and Leigh-Mallory wanted to wait. Eisenhower pointed out that air domination and operations were a prerequisite for success, and made the decision to postpone the invasion for 24 hours.

THE SHIPS THAT had already begun the crossing were ordered to turn around, return to the mine-swept waterways and anchor again. In the bad weather, this was a difficult manoeuvre but it was managed nevertheless, and the Germans remained ignorant of what was to come. For all the soldiers and sailors, the wait and the uncertainty were dreadful, whether they were crowded on a ship or waiting to climb into a transport plane. Even though many were afraid, most still wanted to get it over with.

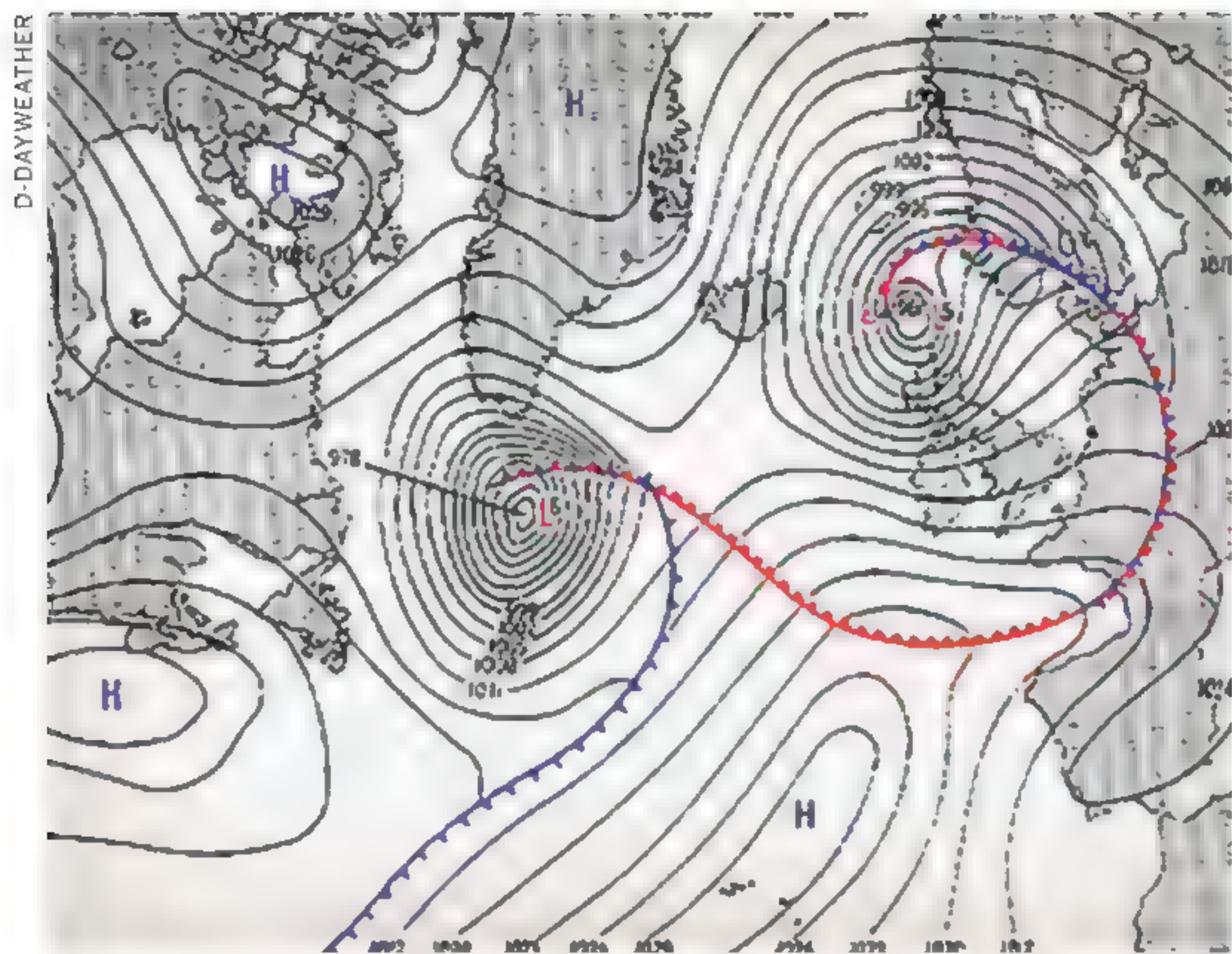
Eisenhower spent large parts of 4th June chain-smoking outside his trailer and waiting for the next weather forecast. In the evening, he had dinner with the other senior commanders. The bad weather was still clearly noticeable, but after dinner, Group Captain Stagg announced a much better forecast. He now promised a gap in the low pressure that should mean better weather during the 5th and morning of the 6th of June. After that, the weather would change again, but it wasn’t possible to predict how. He also believed that the cloud cover would break enough for flights to operate during the night between 5th and 6th June. His reviewed forecast caused the middle-aged generals and admirals to start cheering.

AS THE ONE with overall command, Eisenhower still thought the weather made the whole operation very risky and he asked his subordinates for their opinions. Once again, Montgomery was fiercely optimistic and wanted to get started, while the flight commanders were hesitant. Leigh-Mallory said that for the attack flights, the weather seemed chancy, while Tedder thought that the heavy bombing of

US soldiers wade ashore from an LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) boat on Omaha Beach at 16.00 on D-Day.

KEYSTONE/GETTY





The weather on 5th June 1944 shows the gap in low pressure that made the operation possible.

the beach defences was achievable but carried risk. The idea of temporarily suspending the invasion was further halted by Ramsay, who pointed out that the commander of the US naval units needed to be notified within 30 minutes if he was to set things in motion and carry out the landings on 6th June. Another postponement would mean that they wouldn't be ready again for 48 hours. By then, the tidal conditions would no longer be optimal, so a postponement would in practice move the invasion to 19th June.

NO MATTER WHAT Eisenhower decided, the time constraints meant that he was forced to take a gamble. He walked thoughtfully back and forth across the room, with his head bowed and his hands clasped behind his back. He asked his colleagues to repeat their positions. Eisenhower calmly weighed the pros and cons, and at 21.45 announced: "I am quite positive we must give the order." After a few more brief words from the others, Eisenhower declared: "OK, we'll go." Within minutes, the room was empty as everyone hurried off to execute the

"HE COULD GET OTHERS TO DO A GOOD JOB"

order. He was left alone while his subordinates set to work.

On the German side, Hitler had made some misjudged decisions. Rundstedt complained that the only thing he, as commander-in-chief, had authority over was "to change the guard in front of my gate". Neither Rommel nor he had any operational command over air and naval units, but that was of little consequence as they were so weak. Hitler didn't trust the loyalty of his generals and blamed all military difficulties on them. Unwilling to delegate responsibility for the important Panzer Group West, it could only move on his orders. When the alarm sounded at dawn on 6th June and reserves were required to be sent to Normandy, Hitler was asleep in his headquarters far away in the Berghof in Bavaria, and no one was allowed to wake him.

DURING OPERATION OVERLORD'S planning stages and the start of the invasion, the Allies had the upper hand compared to the Germans in terms of leadership and warfare. In France, the Germans' tactics and usual efficiency had been off form. For the Allies, the sole responsibility for the invasion rested on one man, which was necessary for co-ordinating all the resources. The success of the invasion was largely due to Eisenhower and the well-oiled Allied leadership. When President Roosevelt chose Eisenhower to lead Operation Overlord, many were surprised. They thought his command style was too vague and he lacked an eye for operational issues. But Eisenhower's strength lay not in the fact that he was a brilliant general but that he could get others to do a good job. 🇺🇸

Marco Smedberg is a military history writer.



GEORGE PATTON

Refused to toe

Patton in the Tunisian desert, in 1943. In his holster is a Colt Peacemaker with an ivory handle – one of the general's trademarks.



the line

The former cavalryman George Patton never forgot his roots. He viewed tanks as a **modern-day cavalry**, and when it came to armoured combat, he considered himself far superior to his counterparts Rommel and Guderian.

Text: **TORBJÖRN KVIST**

Mexico, 1916. Following air reconnaissance, the first ever US armoured squad – three cars and ten men from the 6th Infantry Regiment – was sent out on a raid. When the unit returned, General Julio Cárdenas, the head of the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa's bodyguard, had been killed, and his body, along with those of two of his men, was tied to one of the cars' bonnets. The troop's commander had come from the 8th Cavalry Regiment, a keen lieutenant with a strange high-pitched voice, and the nickname "Old Blood and Guts". His name was George Smith Patton Jr.

Fast-forward to mid-December 1944, and the US Third Army was stationed in front of the German *Westwall* (Siegfried Line) along the Saar River. Another winter of war was approaching. The month before, the old garrison town of Metz had been cleared of German troops. It had been a tough nut to crack, as it had been in every war that had passed through the Moselle Valley.

The Third Army had slowed down its advance somewhat, mostly because of what the Allies expected

to be waiting for them once they crossed the *Westwall* and the Rhine, the last obstacles that separated them from the German lowlands and Berlin.

General Patton, the already legendary commander of the Third Army, was concerned. The staff around the table felt his unease, and saw Colonel Oscar W Koch, his German-born head of intelligence, bite his lower lip before making his status report.

By comparing his own data with that of Courtney Hodge's First Army in the north and Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group further back, Koch had identified two large German assembly areas as far north as Düsseldorf. This was consistent with the conclusion he had drawn just over three weeks earlier: that almost every German panzer division had withdrawn from their sectors between Thionville in the north and Saint-Avold in the south.

It had been one thing after another: on 23rd November, Koch had identified the brand new German 6th Panzer Army at Aachen; on 2nd December, the dreaded Panzer Lehr Division was reported as "missing"; and on 5th December, the First US Army staff was notified that as many as ►

GEORGE PATTON

- nine new German divisions had been identified in front of VIII Corps. The latter was of particular note because this corps had only arrived in the Ardennes from Brittany as late as October, to recover in what transpired to be a treacherous static position immediately north of the Third Army.

Patton dropped his reading glasses on to the maps as he straightened his back, his head high above the others around the table. Colonel Koch crossed his arms and Brigadier General Hobart 'Hap' Gay, the chief of staff, summed up the situation. Everyone knew what the old man, Patton, was thinking: that Bradley and Hodges were idiots.

Ever since August, with the successful encirclement of the Germans in the Falaise Pocket, which Patton had made possible with his rapid advance, a certain apathy had set in vis-à-vis the Wehrmacht, in light of the constant German retreats through France and Belgium.

The Allied strategy of advancing on a broad front, which Patton hated as much as his rival Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, had further reinforced the illusion, spread by the Allied staff, that it would only need a hole to be kicked in the *Westwall* for the entire defence to collapse. Patton didn't go so far as to call his old friend Dwight Eisenhower a fool, but he cursed Bradley.

Patton's insistence that the *Westwall* would give the Germans no choice but to turn around and go on the counteroffensive because otherwise the Rhine would become an obstacle for them as well fell on deaf ears. Patton later said he felt like Confederate General James Longstreet, General Robert E Lee's deputy, before the Battle of Gettysburg. Longstreet was able to see what was happening right in front of him, but unable to convince anyone else.

The Germans' brilliant leadership fascinated Patton; their impressive ability to constantly recover showed that they weren't beaten at all. They could still turn around on the Eastern Front and strike back when it pleased them. The fact that German soldiers still had confidence in their commanders rang alarm bells for a leader like Patton.

When not even Montgomery's unsuccessful Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands in September 1944 meant anything to Bradley and the others, what would it take? An SS Panzer Corps had suddenly appeared in Arnhem and unleashed bloodshed on British paratroopers – Panther tanks against machine guns. Patton shook his head and left the table. His chief of staff watched him go. During the late autumn, they had realised that the Germans were engaged in planning something big for the near future, directly north-east of the Third Army's area of operation, something that

increasingly began to resemble the German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's revised Fall Gelb – the attack on France in 1940 via the Ardennes.

What General Gay didn't know was that his boss had the ability to see far beyond that. Patton was the only army commander to receive information from Ultra, the British secret intelligence service, a fact that would have further strengthened Gay's judgement of Patton's point of view. Ultra probably played an important role in Patton's relationship with Colonel Koch, the intelligence genius. They were the perfect couple – Koch diligent and thorough, Patton demanding and insightful.

General Gay could never have imagined then that almost exactly a year later, he would be standing by Patton's side, with his arm in a sling, watching the old man suffer desperately after being fatally injured in a car accident.

General George S Patton Jr died aged 60 in Heidelberg, Germany, on 21st December 1945. The cause of death was a pulmonary embolism – a blood clot that had formed after heavy trauma to the body sustained in the car accident. At his request, he wasn't buried back home in the United States but in Hamm, in the eastern part of Luxembourg city.

With his death, a gradual dismantling of his legacy began. Patton's autobiography, *War as I Knew It*, was quickly superseded by far more current and sought-after works, written by well-known former generals such as President Dwight Eisenhower and former Secretary of State George W Hallhall. None of them had any interest in digging too deeply into their war memories for Patton's sake, so the official story came from Omar Bradley.

Bradley had a chip on his shoulder about Patton, a grudge that had probably begun in Sicily in 1943 when Patton had criticised and pressured him while he was head of the II Corps, on the flank of the general's advancing Seventh Army. In 1970, Bradley served as technical advisor during the filming of Franklin J Schaffner's biopic *Patton*, with George C Scott in the titular role. The film was based in part on Bradley's autobiography, *A Soldier's Story*, and influenced the public's perception of Patton as a despotic lover of war.

It was not until the end of the 20th century that an alternative image of the general was presented, and now, in the 21st century, his autobiography is being republished. Regardless of the motivation of the narrator, what has always been difficult to deny when it comes to telling Patton's story is the fact that he was a military genius.

In the 1920s, at least 75 percent of the world's military literature had been written by Germans, and Patton had read it all, especially texts about



Patton at the Virginia Military Institute, where he trained in 1907.

armoured combat by Heinz Guderian. And so, as he stood with his hands on his hips, on the banks of the Red River in Louisiana during a field exercise in which tanks from his 2nd Armored Division had to cross the river with a red band on his helmet, upon which two stars also shone, he felt completely safe.

The Japanese had not yet attacked Pearl Harbor, but Congress had given the go-ahead to hold military manoeuvres – the largest ever in US history – in the southern United States in the summer of 1941. A total of 500,000 men participated – most of the regular army as it then stood, as well as the National Guard from half a dozen states.

It was a grandiose event with hundreds of ‘deaths’, but it was here that the US military tested its theories before it inevitably entered the war. The Germans’ blitzkrieg had been studied in detail and the US Army that practised in the southern states was a completely different force compared to the one that had existed just a few years earlier. Masses of new equipment was tested: the Garand rifle, the characteristic round helmet, various prototypes for Sherman tanks. The key figures who would lead US troops in the war were all determined during these manoeuvres: Dwight Eisenhower, Courtney Hodges, Lucian Truscott, Omar Bradley, Mark Clark, Troy Middleton and the star of the show, ‘Georgie’ Patton.

Patton was born in 1885 in California, but his family was originally Virginian, as were the greatest Confederate generals Robert E Lee and Stonewall Jackson. It was his grandfather, colonel of the Confederate States Army, George S Patton Sr, who after the Civil War, left his beloved South for the west coast, but his grandson always carried his Southern roots with him. He thrived in the Deep South, holding court like a plantation owner when he socialised with the local gentry.

Patton was generous with his considerable fortune and his colleagues could only shake their heads and readily accept his friendship. He was quick witted and funny, but his fear of being perceived as old man by his comrades who were more than 10 years his junior was obvious. But he could depend on his skill, experience and charm as he edged towards retirement.

The Louisiana manoeuvre was a great triumph for him; his armoured division seemed to have been everywhere at once, and many generals expressed frustration in their field reports over what they considered to be irregular manoeuvres by Patton. It was there, in the poor Deep South, that he taught his colleagues the principles of blitzkrieg.

Patton wasn’t afraid of Rommel or Guderian. He was happy to point out to those willing to listen that he had more experience in armoured warfare



During World War I, Patton rose rapidly through the ranks. Photo from the summer of 1918, when he was a lieutenant colonel, with a ‘Six Ton Tank’, the M1917 (a US-made copy of the Renault FT).

“The Germans’ outstanding leadership fascinated him; their ability to constantly recover”

than any German general. When German officers retreated on the Western Front during World War I, the young Major Patton led his own tank battalion in the final stages of the war. He could barely wait; he wanted nothing more than to cross the ocean and face the German panzer generals.

George S Patton had a favourite expression: “There is no such thing as ‘tank country’.” By that he literally meant that, properly adapted, the tank can be applied to any combat situation. But Patton also intended his phrase to have a figurative meaning, endorsing a principle that has always prevailed in the US military: to take the battle to your enemy, and win by any means possible.

The American Civil War became known as history’s first modern war for a reason. The US Army was a modest force at the outset and filled with reserve officers who were soon promoted, making new ways of thinking and new strategies inevitable. No corresponding development had taken place in Europe, where commanders remained in office for life and the nobility determined the order of the day.

Patton was trained in the American spirit, and always remained a distinctly modern military man, despite his classicism, pomp and age. He was a man of his time, and someone who, in all ►

GEORGE PATTON

► seriousness, claimed that he was the reincarnation of a Roman legionary.

When the United States joined World War II and US troops began to arrive in Britain, they were received with joy. But also with concern; US policy dictated that the invasion of the European continent had to take place as soon as possible, preferably in 1943. They were prepared, they said, and they were serious.

The British protested – they knew the realities of war, as seen in the failed raid on Dieppe in August 1942, and were also determined to protect their colonial interests in North Africa and the Middle East? (That last one, however, was never mentioned publicly.) The US never really understood what it

perceived to be a detour through Africa and Italy.

So, Patton entered the war in Morocco, as the US commanding general, and was then left in charge in Casablanca while the unfortunate Lloyd Fredendall took his II Corps to Tunisia and the Kasserine Pass. But Patton never had to worry – there was no chance that either the commander-in-chief in Washington, General Marshall, or the commander-in-chief of Europe, General Eisenhower, would fail to use him.

By the autumn of 1944, every battalion commander in

Patton's Third Army had learned that the old man could storm into the staff tent at any moment, stare at their maps, and simply change the positions of a company here, a neighbouring battalion there. They were constantly kept on their toes, and knew this approach as the 'rock soup' tactic (from the old folk tale in which a beggar asks for a rock to make soup, then asks for more and more ingredients to improve it a little, until he has a tasty meal). Prompted by the poor supply situation due to the failure to secure sufficient port capacity in western Europe, and the prevailing broad front strategy, Patton became adept at this 'rock soup' tactic.

He used active reconnaissance, and encouraged his scruffy and surprisingly unruly scouts to exploit the smallest gap in the heavily stressed German defence to the max. Patton's basic reconnaissance units launched more large-scale attacks than any other on the Western Front. Once those attacks were underway, there was little Bradley could do other than give Patton extra resources.

At dawn on 16th December 1944, the Germans took the Allies by surprise in Hitler's biggest

“He could barely wait; he wanted nothing more than to cross the ocean and face the German panzer generals”

counterattack in the west – the Battle of the Bulge, with 250,000 men, 1,800 tanks and 2,000 guns, all seemingly appearing from nowhere.

Three days later, a composed Patton travelled by jeep from Verdun to Luxembourg to set up an advanced command post. He'd attended an unforgettable staff meeting with Walter Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's chief-of-staff. Almost everyone had been there and Eisenhower had displayed an anger that was completely out of character.

He demanded to know how the Germans had been allowed attack the US VIII Corps and the rest of the First Army with two panzer divisions. Why hadn't it been discovered in beforehand? Omar Bradley was red-faced: the criticism was aimed at him, albeit indirectly.

The Battle of the Bulge turned out to be the biggest disaster for the US during the war.

In just three weeks, 20,000 death notices were sent home to the United States and a shocked public. Patton announced that he could stage an attack from the south with three divisions on the morning of 23rd December – in just four days' time – in order to strike at Bastogne, where two regiments from the 101st Airborne Division had been surrounded. Everyone in the room stared at him, Bradley wanted to protest, but he was stopped by Eisenhower, who approved the proposal.

The next day, 20th December, Eisenhower took direct command and placed all US troops north of the Bastogne-Sankt Vith line under Montgomery's 21st Army Group. This left the area of operations south of the line to Patton alone, a measure that effectively cut Bradley out of the chain of command, reducing him to little more than a quartermaster general. For the rest of his life, Bradley would think that his friends had betrayed him, especially Patton. Not even promotion to four-star general shortly afterwards could alleviate his disappointment.

Bradley's hesitation during the staff meeting, however, was legitimate. On 18th December, he'd ordered Patton to attack the German rear – but Patton didn't give a damn about the rear. Most of his army was busy penetrating the *Westwall* and crossing the River Saar.

Bradley did venture that Patton lacked reserves. When he pointed out that the 4th Armored Division



Patton in talks with Colonel Lyle Bernard from 30th Infantry Regiment, near Brolo in Sicily, in August 1943.

and the 26th and 80th Infantry Divisions in the south would have to disengage from the Third Army and move north in just four days everyone was surprised. Everyone except Patton, who replied that he had already planned the move. He was obviously a few steps ahead of everyone else.

When Eisenhower left Verdun that day, he was confident in the knowledge that “Georgie” was taking care of the matter. But that meant little to Patton, sitting smoking in his jeep. A preliminary order had been given to the chief of staff, General Gay, even before he’d left that morning. Now he oversaw the beginning of the whole operation in detail, via radio, and completely from memory.

The regrouping of the Third Army in snowy northern France in the days before Christmas 1944 have gone down in military history as perhaps the best ever executed. The logistical challenge was enormous and the effort of the staff and various units almost superhuman. Three divisions travelled bumper to bumper, including Patton’s own ‘guard’, the 4th Armored Division, which formed a column nearly 20 kilometres long. It was a movement of more than 200 kilometres, with a total of over 15,000 vehicles and 55,000 men, which could potentially run across an army that was fighting around the clock.

This meant that all the status reports had to be correct, hundreds of tanks had to be serviced, or replacement vehicles had to be available at the right places, that the soldiers had to be fed, units redirected, and the traffic jams avoided. General Gay’s staff, under Patton’s direct supervision, moved 63,000 tonnes of equipment during the regrouping, an average of 4,500 tonnes of ammunition per day. Hundreds of thousands of new maps, weighing a total of 57 tonnes, were distributed, 450 kilometres of road were built, and approximately 3,200 kilometres of telephone cable were laid. Patton later wrote that it was “only made possible by the old and very experienced general staff of the Third Army and the high discipline and devotion to duty of all the units involved”.

At 06.00 on 22nd December 1944, one day earlier than planned, the lead units from 4th Armored Division stood along two parallel paths in the dark and snowy forests on the Luxembourg border. They were supported by as many as 108 artillery battalions – 1,300 guns – which opened fire in unison shortly before the marching order was given, so the platoon’s deputy commander, a

young sergeant, couldn’t hear the tanks in the line being started one by one, huddled as he was in his tank’s turret. He was in the fourth vehicle from the front and it wasn’t until he saw something move up beside him out of the corner of his eye that he became aware of what had happened.

It was a truck that slowed down with a jerk, and the sergeant was about to bend down and order his tank to start up, when he saw the man in the back. He stood like a Roman centurion, wearing a leather jacket with a fur-lined collar, and a polished helmet on his head. Binoculars hung around his neck, and when he turned and nodded at him, the sergeant saw the three stars on his helmet. It was Patton; the old man was in the habit of waiting by the fourth vehicle in the event of an attack.

Patton felt right at home in the north of France. He’d ridden around the region in 1918, when it had been a relaxing privilege for a cavalry officer like him. Since his old commander and mentor, General John ‘Black Jack’ Pershing, had given him the confidence to lead the United States’ first and only armoured battalion, horse riding had become more of a hobby.

He’d stabled the horses and made tanks his passion. But only on the surface, because in Patton’s world, armoured forces were the new cavalry – they always had been. Independent, fast, penetrating and indomitable, just like him. And so it was that fate, which he lived so strictly by, brought him to that very moment, the greatest he would ever experience in his life. ★

Torbjörn Kvist is a freelance writer and film and TV producer.

General Patton points the way for US troops in Sicily, 11th July 1943.



General Douglas MacArthur
(centre) leads US troops
in the recapture of the
Philippines in 1945.



Douglas MacArthur

Hot-headed war hero



**“On 9th January 1945,
US troops were able
to land on Luzon and
MacArthur announced:
‘I have returned’”**

He was the general behind the US victory in the Pacific, skilled at all levels of warfare, but Douglas MacArthur's hard-line personality eventually became his downfall.

Text: **LARS ERICSON WOLKE**

A war hero, albeit a noticeably bitter one, faced the US Congress. Appearing in a joint session of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, 71-year-old General Douglas MacArthur delivered his farewell speech to the US public. The man who was considered by many to have made the

biggest contribution to the victory over Japan in the Pacific War had now been unceremoniously fired, because during the ongoing Korean War, he refused to acknowledge the fact that the US president was also commander-in-chief – the country's supreme leader in war. It was during this meeting of Congress that MacArthur also uttered the classic phrase, “old soldiers never die, they just fade away”. That's ►

DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

FOTORESEARCH/GETTY



US buildings in the Philippines burn after a Japanese attack on 12th December 1941.

► exactly how he claimed he wanted to slip away: with little drama. It was a philosophy that was completely at odds with how he'd lived and worked.

As with so many other officers, assuming they'd survived, Douglas MacArthur's career took off during World War I. In France, he was first commander of the 84th Infantry Regiment and then of the 42nd Division, known as the Rainbow Division, because, unlike most units, it recruited from a number of different US states.

Once back home, MacArthur was appointed major general in 1925, and from 1928-30 was commander of US troops in the Philippines. After serving as chief of staff in his home country, MacArthur returned to the Philippines in 1936-37, now as commander of the Philippine Army. This was a standalone force but it fell under US supreme command until the Philippines gained independence from the United States in July 1946.

As the war clouds gathered, the experienced MacArthur was called back into service, now as the supreme commander of the US and Philippine forces in the Far East. He had barely settled into the job before the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941, and only 12 hours later, Japan attacked the Philippines. MacArthur chose to concentrate his defence on the Bataan Peninsula on the island of Luzon. The tactically skilled Japanese units had superior firepower, while the poorly equipped US troops soon suffered a shocking shortage of ammunition, medicine and food.

Despite all the difficulties, the troops on the Bataan Peninsula didn't surrender until April 1942, and in May, the last US troops laid down their arms on the fortified island of Corregidor. For the surviving US and Philippine soldiers, a cruel death

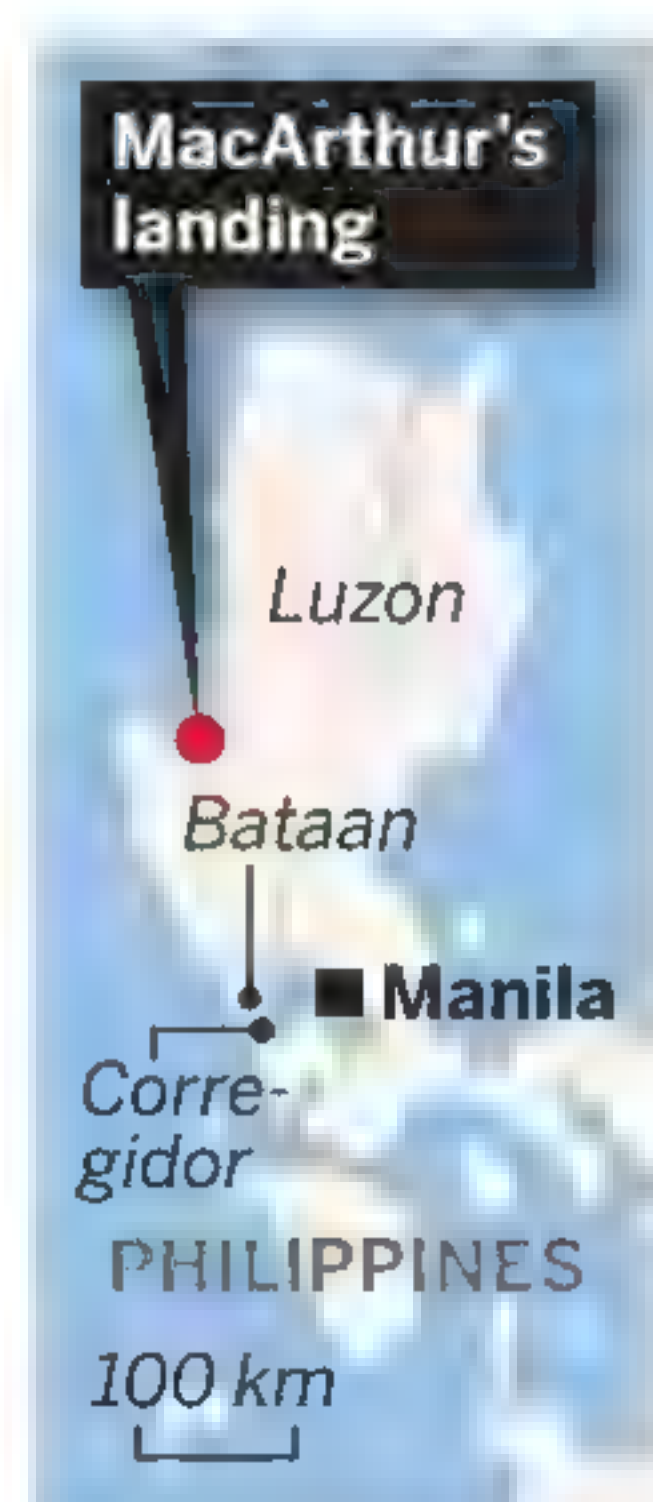
march to the Japanese POW camps now awaited. But MacArthur had by then left the Philippines on the direct orders of President Roosevelt. Before leaving on 11th March 1942, he uttered the words that would become legendary: "I shall return."

The Japanese onslaught at the turn of 1941-42 not only swept across the Philippines but also affected large parts of Southeast Asia. However, without the fierce opposition in the Philippines tying up considerable numbers of Japanese troops, the Japanese tsunami could easily have washed up on Australia's shores. MacArthur's defence helped save Australia from a Japanese invasion in early 1942. Afterwards, he was evacuated there, and set up his headquarters in central Brisbane.

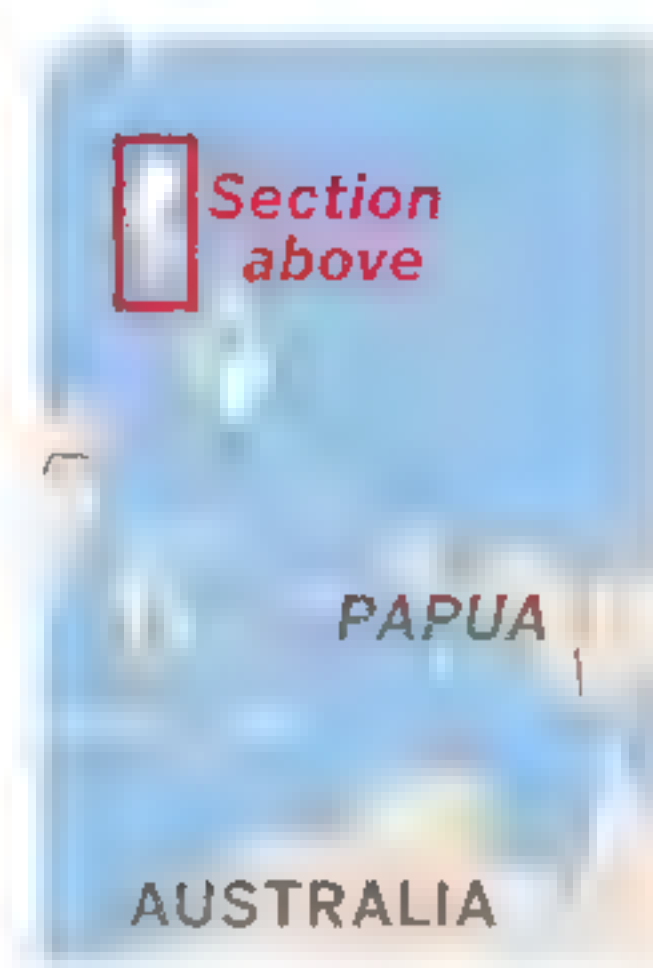
Once in Australia, there could have been repercussions, because the protection of the Philippines had been so poorly prepared, but the tragic-yet-heroic defence of Bataan and Corregidor had earned him a reputation among the US public that President Roosevelt couldn't ignore. In the spring of 1942, the United States had a woeful shortage of war heroes who could symbolise strong defiance in the face of the enemy, which is why the president appointed MacArthur as supreme commander of the South West Pacific Area (SWPA).

By doing that, the president managed to separate two theatres of war and two dynamic leaders who didn't always find it easy to co-operate with others. While MacArthur commanded in the south, with a focus on returning to the Philippines, the fleet under Admiral Chester Nimitz was given responsibility for the waters and islands of the Pacific Ocean. It has been claimed that this split between two commanders caused a division of Allied power instead of a strengthening of force in the Pacific, directly focussed on Japan. That criticism certainly has a lot of justification, but it ignores the incredible distances involved, where joint management would have found it very difficult to combine overview with insightful tactical work.

MacArthur's first endeavour was to try to stop a Japanese invasion of the Papuan Peninsula in New Guinea, otherwise Australia would be at risk once more. Australian forces had managed to save the important city of Port Moresby through some difficult battles, and with two poorly trained National Guard divisions, the US succeeded in expelling the Japanese from the Buna region in January 1943, thus inflicting a decisive defeat. Later, MacArthur denied that the Buna victory was unnecessarily costly, but the fact was that the mortality rate among his troops was three times higher than that of the Marine Corps soldiers who captured the island of Guadalcanal around the same time. But the Buna campaign provided



Luzon is the Philippines' northernmost large island.



important tactical experience and MacArthur learned to appreciate the value of air combat forces. He also gained clear insights into the conditions and possibilities of naval warfare. After MacArthur complained about his limited ability to move at sea, the Seventh Amphibious Force under Rear Admiral Daniel E Barbey was transferred to SWPA.

This increased mobility, together with tactical flights and the US's ability to intercept radio communications, facilitated many future missions. In addition, many of the Japanese bases were poorly fortified and their air defences even weaker. Soon, a tactic was developed that involved cutting off and attacking Japanese garrisons before ground and naval units went on the offensive. MacArthur had the invaluable support of two flight commanders: General George C Kenney and Lieutenant General Ennis C Whitehead.

At first, the advance was slow, mainly because MacArthur's troops suffered from a shortage of virtually everything. But then the pace increased. On 20th October 1944, US units landed on the island of Leyte in the Philippines. The landing went well but everything was about to end in disaster when Japanese naval forces broke through the US Navy lines and reached the landing ships. However, the US's luck changed and the battle in Leyte Bay ended

with the Japanese fleet being swept from the sea. On 9th January 1945, US troops were able to land on Luzon and MacArthur waded ashore saying: "I have returned." The promise of March 1942 was fulfilled.

The continued fighting was tough, however, and in Manila, Japanese troops went on the rampage, violently abusing the civilian population before US troops took control of the city. The recapture of the Philippines cost the United States 62,000 men, including 14,000 dead, and the Philippine guerrillas lost several thousand men. The Japanese lost 350,000 men, of whom 205,000 died. At least 50,000 Japanese soldiers continued to fight in the Philippine Islands until September. When Japanese representatives signed the formal ►



MacArthur in Manila, 1945.

“In Manila, Japanese troops went on the rampage, violently abusing the civilian population”



US troops prepare an attack on Japanese forces in the Philippine capital Manila in February 1945.

DOUGLAS MACARTHUR

► surrender of their country aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2nd September 1945, MacArthur led the ceremony. It was payback for his humiliating flight from the Philippines three and a half years earlier.


Following the Japanese surrender on 15th August 1945, the Allied occupation of defeated Japan began on 28th August. As the supreme commander of the Allied occupation forces, MacArthur became known as “the uncrowned emperor of Japan”. Here he showed a completely different and – for many – unexpected side, namely that of a diplomat.

MacArthur succeeded in establishing a relatively trusting relationship with Emperor Hirohito, thereby creating stability and calm in the country’s leadership. It is to MacArthur’s credit that the war could so smoothly transition into a relatively peaceful occupation, and from its end in 1952, into an alliance that still exists between the former enemies, Japan and the United

States. But by 1952, MacArthur had already left Japan for Korea.

On 25th June 1950, North Korean forces crossed the border into US-backed South Korea. The invaders swept south, and Seoul and large parts of the country fell. Soon, only a small bridgehead remained around the southern port city of Pusan, where South Korean and US units were located. In New York, the UN denounced North Korea’s move as an invasion, and a number of member states sent troops and other military aid to South Korea’s defence. The commander-in-chief of United Nations Command in Korea, Douglas MacArthur, was in charge of the lion’s share of the military effort. At first it looked hopeless – the surrounded Allied troops at Pusan were at risk of being wiped out if they weren’t evacuated to Japan.

General MacArthur’s operational solution to the problem was based on his experience in World



General Douglas MacArthur with his classic corn-cob pipe. The picture was taken in 1948, when MacArthur led the US occupation of Japan.

Skilled at all levels of warfare

★ Douglas MacArthur was certainly a war hero, but hardly a straightforward one.

The British military theorist Basil Liddell Hart described the US commander as “supreme among the generals” due to his combination of strategic vision, tactical skill and

insights into the importance of operational mobility. Senior military commanders can be good tacticians or strategists, or they can master the art of operations. But MacArthur had a particularly strong understanding of both strategy and operational matters: he understood the strategic

consequences of a any given tactical decision, and, conversely, the tactical or operational requirements for achieving a desired strategic effect.

This combination of abilities and insights put him ahead of most Allied senior commanders during World War II.

War II. He simply went around the enemy’s main forces, cutting them off from the rest, and on 15th September 1950, a US invasion began at Inchon, on the west coast of South Korea.

The operation was a great success and destroyed the North Korean forces’ links to the north. On 29th September, South Korean President Syngman Rhee was reinstated in a liberated Seoul, with MacArthur on hand. Two days earlier, UN forces had crossed the border into North Korea.

If Inchon was considered a huge success for General MacArthur, what followed was a major setback. He dismissed all warnings of Chinese intervention on North Korea’s side, and assured President Truman that even if China did get involved, the US’s superior air power would destroy Chinese ground forces. MacArthur was wrong on both counts, and the result was an emergency retreat for the UN troops when large Chinese units crossed the Yalu River into North Korea. Unlike many other prominent military leaders, MacArthur advocated strong counterattacks against the Chinese units, which, after serious intelligence failures, led to new setbacks.

In practice, MacArthur forced President Truman’s hand by calling for an offensive war policy. But when the general publicly advocated an escalation of Allied air strikes on Chinese bases in Manchuria – that is, on Chinese territory – the political leadership put its foot down. In April 1951, President Truman fired MacArthur. He refused to have a general who, through constant press statements, tried to steer the president’s way through Korean politics. Thus, MacArthur’s long career came to a halt.

MacArthur had a strong personality and was a driving force as a leader, but he was also ruthless. His soldiers, despite their admiration for their supreme commander, also resented him for not seeming to think that their lives or health were important. MacArthur was also one of the first US officers to actively cultivate contacts with



US troops on their way to the beaches of Leyte, Philippines, witness the air duels above.
Photo from October 1944.

US COAST GUARD

“The greater the cult around the war hero became, the more egotistical MacArthur became”

journalists in order to promote his own personal reputation. The greater the cult around the war hero became, the more egotistical MacArthur became. As a result, he could no longer see the gulf between military and political leadership.

MacArthur advocated military action in Korea, which he saw as crucial to achieving the desired military goals, but he didn’t understand that the political consequences were anything but desirable. When he reached that tipping point with an opponent of President Truman’s calibre, not even his reputation as an American war hero could help him and MacArthur was fired on the spot. ★

Lars Ericson Wolke is a professor of history at the Swedish National Defence College and an author.

GEORGY ZHUKOV

Stalin's greatest marshal

At the height of his career, he was hated, feared and admired. He was then pushed aside and ignored. Now Stalin's top commander, Georgy K Zhukov, is once again a celebrated hero in post-Soviet Russia.

Text: **NICLAS SENNERTEG**

He almost might never have existed. Just as when the revolutionary Leo Trotsky disappeared without a trace from the Soviet history books during the Stalin era, the authorities tried to erase the country's greatest general from official records in the 1960s. The Soviet Union's ability to make undesirable people vanish was so great that not even the Soviet news agency, Novosti, knew where to look for him.

After some head-scratching, someone finally remembered that the marshal's daughter might be working at the All-Union Radio station. Via her, the trail led to 5 Sosnovka, Kuntsevo, a suburb of Moscow. It was a relatively large *dacha* (country house) in a leafy area, which few people knew about. The *dacha* had been lent to Zhukov by Stalin for life, and all the furniture was state property that was to be returned on the occupant's death.

There lived the elderly, forcibly retired marshal, almost completely cut off from former friends and colleagues, who no longer dared to visit him. After the political turmoil under Khrushchev, Zhukov was seen as someone it was best not to mention – sometimes his name was completely omitted from historical accounts of battles he'd fought. By the

time Novosti eventually found him, the official freeze around Zhukov had begun to thaw and it was finally possible to ask the marshal to write a memoir about his eventful life.

When Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov was born in Tsarist Russia on 1st December 1896, there was no indication that the boy would become one of the country's most important generals. His poverty-stricken parents sent him to a church primary school in the small village of Strelkovka, near Kaluga, and then he was sent to his uncle in Moscow to train as a furrier. When he was 15 years old, he gained qualifications after attending night school, which was extremely unusual for a poor boy from the countryside.

The year after the outbreak of war in 1914, he was conscripted into the cavalry as a reconnaissance scout. During the war, he was promoted to a non-commissioned officer and decorated twice with the Cross of Saint George. At the time of the October Revolution in 1917, Zhukov was in his home village, recovering from wounds inflicted at the front. It was not until the summer of 1918 that he was back to full health and joined the newly established ►



Zhukov was decorated four times with the Hero of the Soviet Union medal.

Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov is widely regarded as the Soviet Union's foremost strategist during World War II. Photo from around 1946.

BETTMANN/GETTY



“There was no indication that the boy would become one of the country’s most important generals”

In August 1939, Red Army forces under Zhukov's command defeated the Japanese Sixth Army at the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, Mongolia.



- Red Army, which was defending the young Soviet Union against the White Army that wanted to overthrow the Communists and reintroduce the reviled tsarist regime. Zhukov joined the 1st Cavalry Army as a private during this bloody civil war, but rapidly rose through the ranks and began leading a battalion as early as 1919. That same year, he was wounded during the fighting at Tsaritsyn (present-day Volgograd), a city that more than two decades later would gain world recognition under its new name: Stalingrad.

After the war, Zhukov continued his career in the Red Army. During the 1920s and 1930s, he was rapidly promoted through the cavalry. In 1933, he was given command of his own division, which he transformed into a model unit, earning him the Order of Lenin, and leading to him being promoted to commander of a cavalry corps in 1937. By then he was already known as an extremely knowledgeable and energetic commander, who placed great importance on tactical training for his units and physical training for his men. He also came to show significant understanding of the possibilities of mechanised warfare.

At the same time, a side of his personality started to show that would haunt him during World War II. Colleagues and subordinates spoke of him being

“He also came to show significant understanding of the possibilities of mechanised warfare”

“unnecessarily exacting”. In the early 1930s, his superior, Marshal Semyon Budyonny, considered that Zhukov was “unnecessarily harsh and rude”. A later marshal, Konstantin Rokossovsky, noted around the same time that Zhukov was “painfully proud”. Although a committed Communist, his outspoken nature often put him on a collision course with the military’s political officers.

Zhukov defended his exacting standards in his memoirs: “I could not bear to see any slackness in servicemen’s work or behaviour. Some of them would not understand this, and I, for my part, was probably not tolerant enough of human frailties. Certainly, I can see that a lot better now. Experience is a source of important lessons. But it is still my firm belief that no one has the right to lead an easy life at the expense of another’s work. And that is something military people should particularly appreciate, for they are called upon to

be the first to defend their country in the battlefield, unsparing of their lives.”

In 1937, Stalin’s Great Purge affected the Red Army, and many capable officers were executed or disappeared into camps. Even for Zhukov, it was a close call. He was interrogated by a very unfriendly superior, who enquired whether he knew any of the purged men. Such accusations were often enough to cause someone to lose both their career and their life. His commander in the Belorussian Military District, however, averted an unpleasant investigation against him by denouncing the allegations as nonsense.

During the summer of 1938, Zhukov was finally given a post that would see him join the cream of Soviet commanders and make him one of Stalin’s favourites. He was given command of the Soviet forces on the border between Mongolia and Manchuria, where an unofficial border conflict was underway with Japan. His opponent was the Japanese Sixth Army, whose provocation led to several border incidents. When Japanese forces entered Soviet territory in a direct invasion, Zhukov thoroughly defeated them in the Battle of Khalkhin Gol, in August 1939. The victory was so decisive that Japan abandoned the border conflict and Zhukov was decorated with the Hero of the Soviet Union medal (a distinction he received a further three times during his career).

However, the success was overshadowed by the dramatic prelude to World War II, and so remained virtually unknown to the outside world. It had, however, immense importance for the overall course of the war, because the Red Army’s unequivocal victory contributed to Japan’s decision not to attack the Soviet Union when the Germans embarked upon Operation Barbarossa in 1941.

After a short spell as commander of the Kiev Military District, the nation’s largest military zone, where he led the Soviet occupation of the part of Romania called Bessarabia (present-day Moldova), Stalin suddenly appointed him as chief of the general staff in February 1941, despite his lack of any relevant experience.

In this role, he seems to have become aware of the growing German threat and worked feverishly to expand the Soviet armoured and mechanised forces. The defence plans were revised, but suffered a fundamental strategic failure: the Red Army focused on a possible German attack targeting Ukraine, while in fact it would happen further north, towards Moscow.

The misjudgement was Stalin’s and not Zhukov’s, but no one dared to speak out against the dictator. Another fatal mistake on Stalin’s part was not to take ►

Success on the Eastern Front

Moscow, December 1941

★ Zhukov leads a counterattack with rested Siberian divisions, and succeeds in pushing back the German troops. The battle is considered decisive in bringing about the end of World War II.



LONGGARD & CO

Stalingrad, January 1943

★ Using a pincer manoeuvre, Zhukov seals the fate of the German Sixth Army. The battle is an important turning point.

The map shows how the front moved from June 1941 to December 1942.

German siege of the famine-stricken city.

Kursk, July 1943

★ The Red Army stops a huge German armoured offensive under Zhukov. The Nazis lose the strategic advantage on the Eastern Front.

Berlin, April 1945

★ Operation Bagration starts in June 1944. Germany’s Army Group Centre is annihilated and with it the organised Nazi defence on the Eastern Front collapses. The offensive takes Zhukov via Warsaw to Berlin. The capital is captured, ending the war in Europe.

Did Zhukov intend to strike first?

★ On 15th May 1941, a month before the German attack on the Soviet Union, Zhukov drew up a plan for a pre-emptive assault on Germany in the summer of 1941. The plan must have been presented to Stalin by Commissar for Defence Semyon Timoshenko and Zhukov.

This document is highly controversial among historians. Some believe the Soviets seriously planned to attack Germany that summer, and neo-Nazi circles believe that this proves Hitler attacked the Soviet Union only to ward off a Soviet offensive. But most Western historians agree that Stalin hadn’t made any preparations to attack at that time. The plan seems to have existed only on paper.

By May 1941, Zhukov had drawn up a plan to attack Germany.

MIKHAIL MIKHAYLOVICH KALASHNIKOV



GEORGY ZHUKOV

► heed of warnings from spies and diplomats about Hitler's plans. Long after the war, Zhukov confided in author Konstantin Simonov that Stalin trusted his ally Hitler, perhaps more than any other living human being. Ironically, it was the man he trusted the most who would come closest to crushing him.

On 22nd June 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, which led to one huge defeat after another for the Soviet forces. During the interwar period, the Red Army had been considered one of the world's best-armed and most dangerous forces, but it proved inferior to the invading German army that penetrated deep into the Soviet Union. After only a few months of

fighting, the Germans captured Kiev, and soon both Moscow and Leningrad were within reach. In addition to being taken by surprise, Soviet forces were weakened by a lack of co-ordination between different types of units, inadequate supplies and poor leadership due to Stalin's purges and his insistence on having direct involvement in military matters. The losses in terms of human life, equipment and terrain were enormous.

In this desperate situation, as the Soviet Union fought for its very existence, Zhukov's star continued to rise. It was easy to count the number of Soviet generals who dared to make independent and militarily logical decisions in the face of fierce pressure from the frustrated dictator in

the Kremlin. It was in these circumstances that Zhukov's qualities came to the fore.

Just over a month after the German invasion, however, he was deposed as chief of the general staff following a disagreement with Stalin over the fate of Kiev. Zhukov claimed that the city could not be defended. But Stalin insisted, leading to a military catastrophe in which the Soviets lost around half a million soldiers.

After that, Zhukov shuttled back and forth between critical fronts to clear up serious crises or plan counteroffensives. Sometimes he led the troops himself, sometimes he worked as the Soviet High Command's ►

“He planned and monitored the counteroffensive at Stalingrad in the late autumn of 1942, using a pincer attack against the German forces”



Smoke from the PPSH-41 machine gun in combat outside a residential area in Stalingrad.

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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GEORGY ZHUKOV

► representative and co-ordinated various army groups' operations. Among other things, he was the mastermind behind the Soviet defensive successes at Leningrad and Moscow in 1941, which stabilised the situation and calmed the first German storm.

After regaining Stalin's trust, he was appointed deputy commander-in-chief in 1942, making him Stalin's closest military associate. The dictator, who usually didn't appreciate dissenters, seems to have respected Zhukov's outspokenness.

"You know Zhukov was the only person who feared no one. He was not afraid of Stalin. He protected me more than once from Stalin. Especially in the early period of the war. He was a brave man," Marshal Timoshenko claimed.



In 1946, Konev succeeded Zhukov as commander of the ground forces.

While Zhukov protected plenty of commanders from Stalin's wrath, he also gained enemies because of his brutal manner. He continually scolded, threatened and punished those who failed to meet his expectations. Many men felt humiliated by Zhukov's reprimands, including Generals Konev and Chuikov. In the autumn of 1941, Stalin had ordered that Konev be brought to justice after several serious military setbacks, but Zhukov came to his rescue. After that, Zhukov took over command of the front and demoted Konev to act as his deputy. Konev, who was as hot-headed as Zhukov, didn't feel grateful, however, just humiliated. Chuikov was a thorn in Zhukov's side because he felt that Stalin's deputy had taken too much credit for the defence of Stalingrad. Even the warlords of the great Red Army weren't above vanity.

Throughout the war, Zhukov served as both a general and Stalin's trouble-shooter. Among other things, he planned and monitored the counter-

"After regaining Stalin's trust, he was appointed deputy commander-in-chief in 1942"

offensive at Stalingrad in the late autumn of 1942, using a pincer attack against the German forces. Encirclement and pincer manoeuvres were among Zhukov's specialties, but he often encountered resistance from Stalin, who advocated pure frontal attacks on the grounds that the Red Army was not yet sufficiently experienced for such complicated operations. It was only towards the end of the war that Stalin began to give Zhukov a freer hand in this regard.

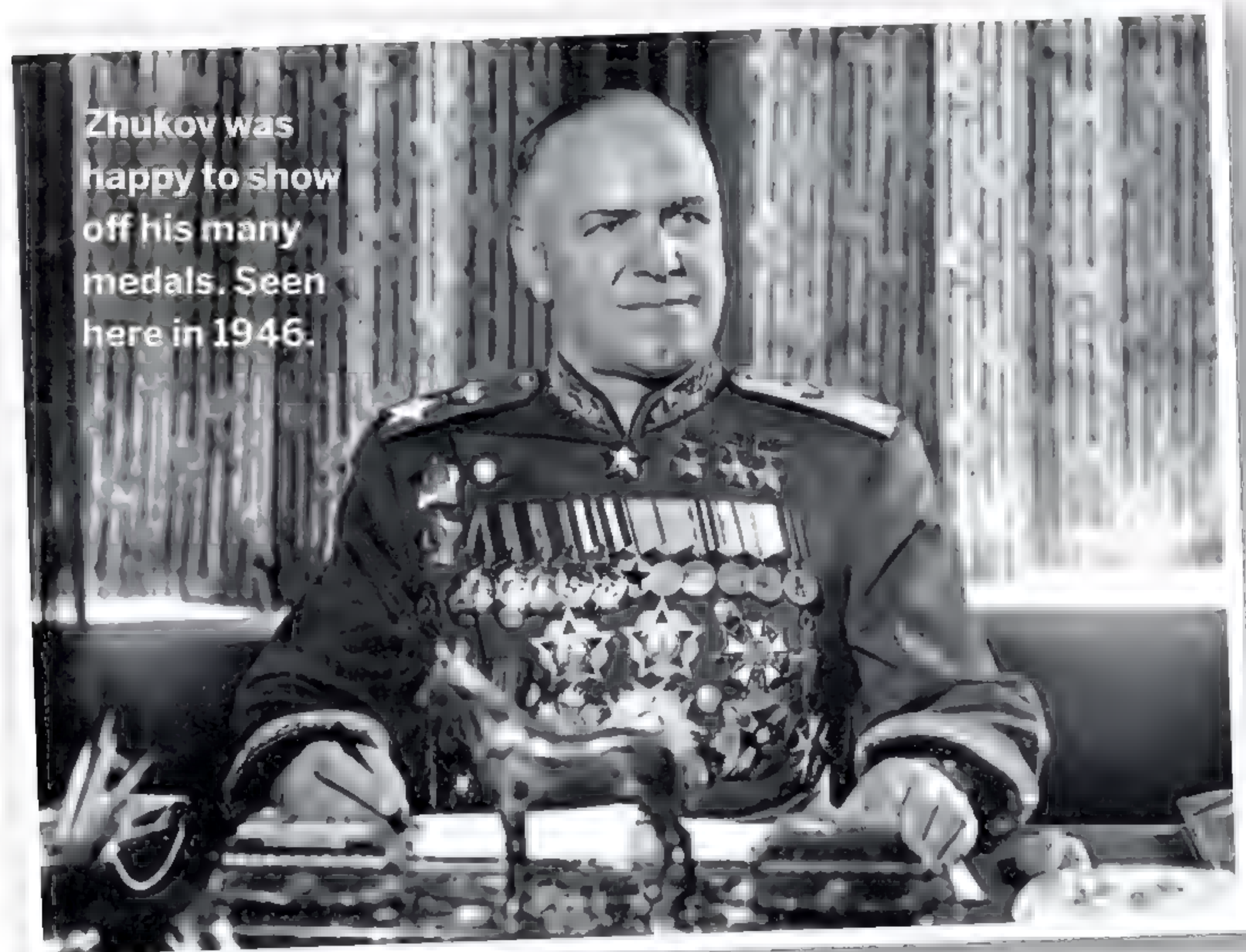
Zhukov wasn't able to take part in the victory at Stalingrad because by then he'd already been sent to the other end of the Eastern Front to organise the first breakthrough of the German siege at Leningrad. After that, in the summer of 1943, he was the Soviet High Command's co-ordinator for the Battle of Kursk, although Marshal Rokossovsky later considered Zhukov's role there to have been exaggerated. In January 1944, he finally shattered the German ring around Leningrad, and in the summer of that year, he led the huge Soviet offensive – Operation Bagration – which took the Red Army all the way to the gates of Warsaw.

After that he led the 1st Belorussian Front, which captured Berlin in 1945. On the way, soldiers under his command committed serious war crimes against German civilians, in the form of rape, murder and looting. Zhukov, however, doesn't seem to have encouraged this behaviour, but tried to prevent it, as it reduced the troops' combat capability.

Zhukov's ability as a commander in the field is debated. On the one hand, there were few Soviet victories on the battlefield in which he didn't play a part. On the other, they often led to a loss of life that no other general in history has come close to matching. The contempt of Soviet generals for the lives of their own soldiers was obvious, but it must also be seen as a product of a totalitarian society in which the individual meant nothing and the community was everything.

After the fall of Germany, Zhukov was appointed commander of the Soviet occupation forces in Germany and his proudest moment must have been receiving the people's praise on a white stallion at the victory parade in Moscow on 24th June 1945.

The marshal was by this point a hugely popular war hero, leading Stalin to consider him a potential rival. On 10th April 1946, he was deposed as



Zhukov was happy to show off his many medals. Seen here in 1946.

PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY

Soldiers from the Red Army advancing during the final Battle of Berlin, spring 1945.



commander of the occupying forces in Germany and sent to the Odessa Military District, a backwater far from Moscow. In 1948, he was transferred to the Ural Military District, which wasn't much better. It was only after Stalin's death in 1953 that Zhukov could return to Moscow and become deputy minister of defence. In 1955, he became minister of defence, and organised the invasion of Hungary in 1956. During the Soviet power games, Zhukov supported Nikita Khrushchev against his Stalinist enemies and took an open stand against Stalinist crimes.

In June 1957, he became a full member of the Central Committee Politburo, but ran up against Khrushchev over the future of the armed forces. While Zhukov advocated large conventional forces, Khrushchev wanted to reduce the navy and army and invest in strategic nuclear weapons. In October, Khrushchev removed Zhukov from office.

In his memoirs, Khrushchev claimed he believed Zhukov would stage a coup against him. Zhukov disappeared from the public eye and was isolated in his *dacha*. During the ensuing anti-Zhukov campaign, several former colleagues launched written attacks on the marshal for both real and fictitious mistakes and atrocities during WWII. One of his main detractors, Vasily Chuikov, who'd defended Stalingrad and led the offensive in the

“He showed great skill, especially in the offensives towards the end of the war”

invasion of Berlin, accused Zhukov of failing to capture Berlin as early as February 1945, before the German defence was organised. Zhukov later defended himself by saying that his troops were too exhausted and needed to rest. In some military historical works published during that period, Zhukov's efforts were almost completely ignored.

After Khrushchev was ousted in October 1964, Zhukov found favour with the new leader, Leonid Brezhnev, but was given no new role. On the 20th anniversary of the victory over Germany, Zhukov received great praise, and in 1969, the first edition of his memoirs was published.

When he died in 1974, Zhukov was still admired in the Soviet Union. And when monuments to Lenin and the Communists were removed in post-Soviet Russia, statues of Zhukov were allowed to remain. ★

Niclas Sennerteg is a journalist and military history writer.

MASAHARU HOMMA

Lived: 1887–1946.

Nationality: Japanese.

Rank: Lieutenant general.

Curious fact: Was known as the “Poet General”.

The “Poet General”
Masaharu Homma
at his desk wearing a
tropical uniform.

BETT MANN/GETTY IMAGES

POET GENERAL EXECUTED FOR WAR CRIMES

He was charming, sensitive, humane and brilliant. But after the war, Masaharu Homma had to pay with his life after humiliating the US's General MacArthur.

THE MAGNUS OLOFSSON



Masaharu Homma
disembarking at Luzon, the
main island in the Philippines,
in December 1941



BETTMAN/GETTY

When military police tied Masaharu Homma to a pole on a miserable Filipino night in April 1946, he could look back on a successful military career that was crowned by a triumphant ride into a captured capital, but which had been cut short when he was made a scapegoat for the incompetence of others. Now he would be shot for war crimes he had neither committed nor even known about.

HOMMA WAS THE most eccentric general in the Japanese army in the first half of the 20th century. A tall Anglophile aristocrat and aspiring writer, he was charming, sensitive, humane and something of a romantic dreamer. His marriages – the first a disaster, the second happy – were to women whom his conservative colleagues frowned upon. Homma has been called the most Westernised of all Japanese generals. He was also an opponent of the war against the United States and Britain, as well as a difficult and questionable subordinate.

The Japanese army forgave him for all this for the simple reason that he was brilliant. No task was

too great for him; training courses and posts were handled with aplomb. Over the years, he had been involved in trench warfare on the Western Front in World War I, met Adolf Hitler, spent several years in India and led a division in the Second Sino-Japanese War. When he was appointed lieutenant general in 1938, his path to even greater heights seemed assured. But the Philippines cost him everything.

HOMMA WAS APPOINTED commander of the Fourteenth Area Army. His mission was to invade the Philippines and take Manila and its key port in 50 days. Homma's soldiers swept aside US and Filipino resistance and, two weeks later, Homma rode into Manila in full dress uniform.

There was a fly in the ointment, however. General Douglas MacArthur had withdrawn his force to the Bataan Peninsula, blocking the use of Manila's port and rendering Homma's victory meaningless. Homma had foreseen such a move from the start and had asked Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo to verify his target: was it to take Manila or to crush MacArthur's army? It was the former, he was told.

Bataan proved easy to defend and Homma had to wait for reinforcements. A victory that, according



General
MacArthur
could not
accept his
defeat in the
Philippines.



Japanese soldiers guard US and Filipino prisoners during the "Bataan Death March" in April 1942.

MANSELL/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION VIA GETTY

to Japanese plans, should have been completed in February finally came in April, while the island stronghold of Corregidor did not fall until May. Imperial Headquarters needed to save face and the unconventional Homma was a suitable scapegoat. Homma's real fault was that he had followed his orders too closely, but now found himself accused of lacking aggression. In August 1942, he was relieved of his command and transferred to the reserve. A brilliant military career was over at the age of 54.

HOWEVER, IT WAS not his superiors who sealed Homma's fate, but his subordinates. More than 80,000 US and Filipino prisoners of war taken at Bataan in April 1942 were set to be moved, but the planned march was a disaster. The Japanese Army hadn't reckoned on so many POWs, and many were already ill and weak. Homma's soldiers were also hungry and sick, and Japanese contempt for prisoners of war also played its part. During the "Bataan Death March", Homma's brutalised soldiers murdered thousands of defenceless POWs or simply left them to die by the side of the road.

Had it not been for Douglas MacArthur, however, Homma could have lived out the rest of his days

in the new, peaceful Japan that emerged after the war. But MacArthur had a Napoleon-sized ego and could not accept his defeat – which resulted in the largest-ever US military surrender. As the de facto ruler of occupied Japan, he had his old adversary arrested for war crimes. The sensitive Homma was suddenly labelled "the Beast of Bataan".

What followed was a show trial. MacArthur's shadow loomed over the courtroom. Everyone involved knew what was expected. Five generals, without legal training, played judge and jury. Hearsay was accepted and little evidence was presented. No proof that Homma had ordered or even knew of the killing ever came to light, but it did not matter. The prosecution claimed he should have known: it was his responsibility. He was sentenced.

THE VERDICT WAS carried out shortly after midnight on 3rd April 1946. Three bullets hit Homma in the heart, killing him instantly. He died as a war criminal, but his real offence was that he had humiliated the egotistical Douglas MacArthur. It was a strange end for a strange man. ★

Magnus Olofsson is an historian.

Admiral warned against war

Isoroku Yamamoto was Japan's most iconic admiral. He was the mastermind behind Pearl Harbor – even though he'd advised against carrying out the attack.

Text: **JOHAN LUPANDER**

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto has gone down in history as the driving force behind the Japanese attack on the United States' Pearl Harbor in December 1941. He was also an unusually complex man, whose main personal interests were calligraphy and writing poetry for his favourite geisha. His fate was to lead his country's navy into a war he had warned against and expected to lose.

During World War II, Japan had a number of prominent army generals who, at the beginning of the war, repeatedly outmanoeuvred their opponents in jungle terrain using outnumbered troops. Most of them were prosecuted for war crimes after the war and executed, which means they fell into obscurity in Western historiography. More famous, therefore, was a naval warrior, despite his enigmatic personality.

ISOROKU YAMAMOTO was born in 1884 into a middle-class samurai family called Takano. At the age of 32, he was adopted by another samurai family, called Yamamoto, which had no sons of its own. This was common practice at the time in several cultures, and something he shared with another of the war's most famous military leaders, the German field marshal, Erich von Manstein.

Yamamoto graduated from the Imperial Japanese Naval Academy in 1904 and was wounded the following year at the Battle of Tsushima. After two years of study at Harvard University in the United States and two postings as a naval attaché in Washington DC, he was a member of several diplomatic delegations. In 1924, he changed speciality from gunnery to naval aviation, convinced that this was where the future of the fleet lay. This was followed by a number of postings as rear admiral and vice admiral on aircraft carriers and in staff positions, including as commander of the fleet's aircraft carrier division. Under his leadership,



NATIONAL ARCHIVES US

Japanese naval aviation developed into the world's most powerful, with six aircraft carriers plus well-equipped and highly trained air forces. The navy's land-based air forces also had fast, long-range torpedo bombers.

MEANWHILE, YAMAMOTO HAD also begun to engage politically, especially in the on-going rivalry between the navy and the army, creating him many enemies. By the end of the 1930s, he had become the most important person in the Japanese Navy – regardless of his formal position. He achieved this both by virtue of his knowledge and character, and through his concern for his comrades – an unusual trait in Japanese military culture, where corporal punishment was not uncommon.

In fact, Yamamoto was held in such high regard, that eventually no one in the naval command dared ►

Fighter and bomber planes ready on an aircraft carrier ahead of the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941.

"YAMAMOTO HAD LONG OPPOSED WAR AGAINST THE UNITED STATES"

ISOROKU YAMAMOTO

Born: 4th April 1884, in
Nagaoka, Japan.

Roles: Russo-Japanese War,
World War I, World War II.

Awards: Supreme Order of
the Chrysanthemum, Order
of the Rising Sun, Order of
the Sacred Treasure, Nazi
Germany's Knight's Cross.

Died: 18th April 1943, in
Bougainville, New Guinea.

The commander of the
Imperial Japanese Navy,
Isoroku Yamamoto, in 1942.

ISOROKU YAMAMOTO

- ▶ to oppose his views or proposals, a state of affairs that would have unfortunate consequences.

AT THE BEGINNING of 1941, Japan decided to invade Southeast Asia, in order to gain control of the region's raw materials. It was decided from the outset that the United States' ability to affect the planned invasion from a military point of view would be reduced by a surprise attack on the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii.

Because of his knowledge and experience, Yamamoto had long opposed war against the United States, whose industrial output was 13 times greater than that of Japan. He didn't believe the usual racist clichés about the decadence and cowardice of Westerners. However, he was also a Japanese nationalist through and through, and became the driving force behind the technical and tactical developments that preceded the initial air strike on Pearl Harbor.

WHEN THE ATTACK was carried out on 7th December 1941, it was an unparalleled tactical and strategic surprise. However, Yamamoto and other commanders soon realised that the main targets of the attack – two US aircraft carriers – had been at sea and escaped the assault, and that all of Pearl Harbor's basic resources, such as dry docks, workshops and fuel depots, had been left

"THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY BECAME THE TURNING POINT FOR THE ENTIRE PACIFIC WAR"

unscathed. From the outbreak of war in December 1941 until March 1942, the Japanese armed forces had a surprising amount of rapid success, but US aircraft carriers and bases in the Eastern Pacific remained intact.

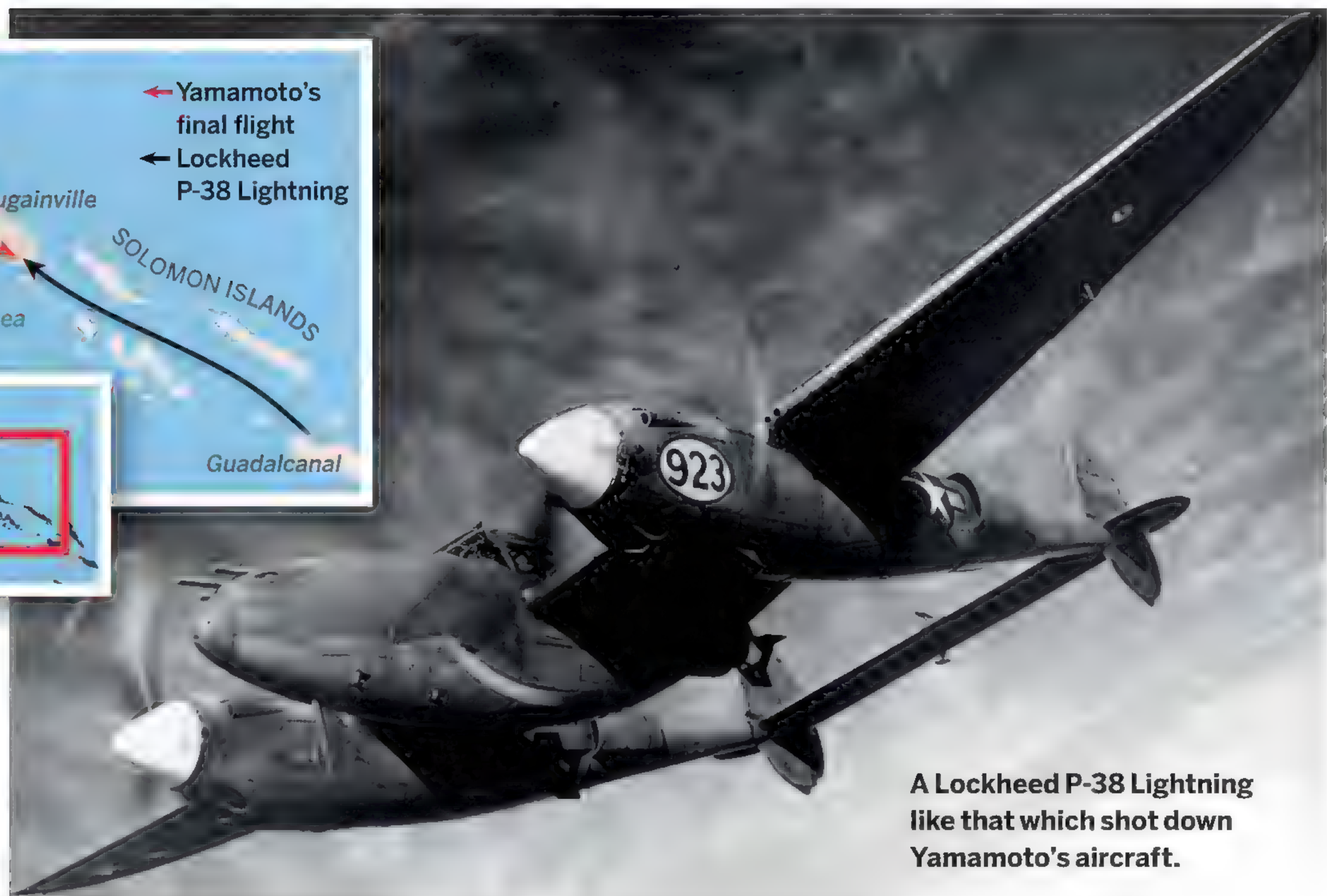
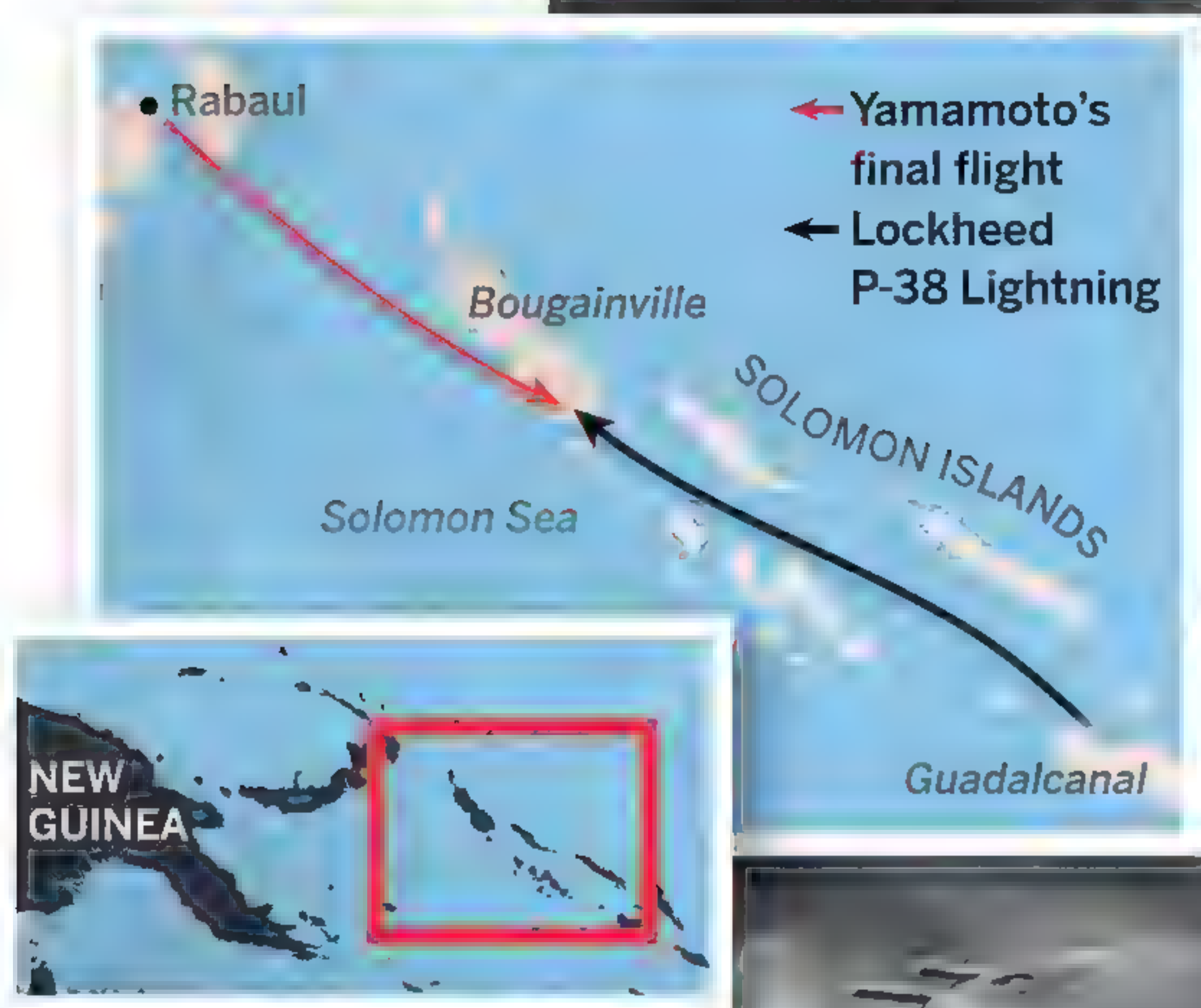
It was important to continue the war so that peace could be established on Japan's terms as quickly as possible, and the Japanese military leadership was driven by a general self-confidence in the country ("Victory Disease"). In a process of political bargaining, a plan was agreed upon that entailed two targets for the main forces of the attack, and a simultaneous assault on a target that wasn't strategically connected to the main operation, and which would split Japan's military resources.

The principal goal was to capture the Midway Atoll as a starting point for an assault on the Hawaiian Islands, and to draw the US Pacific Fleet into a decisive naval battle to protect the atoll. A number of islands in the Aleutians would also be captured in a separate operation.

Two aircraft carriers were to take part in an operation against New Guinea a few weeks earlier, despite the fact that their involvement in the attack on Midway was thus endangered. During this



Yamamoto died in 1943 when his plane was shot down in a US ambush.



A Lockheed P-38 Lightning like that which shot down Yamamoto's aircraft.

US AIR FORCE



operation, they fought the Battle of the Coral Sea, in which one of the ships was severely damaged and the other had its air force nearly wiped out. Neither aircraft carrier could therefore take part in the assault on Midway.

The plan has rightly been criticised for its division of forces, as well as its inherent conflicting goals. The Aleutian operation appears to have been completely pointless, as it was initiated too late to function as a diversionary manoeuvre. Nor were the small weather-ravaged islands captured as starting points for further attacks along the chain to the east.

Yamamoto bore the responsibility for this, because he'd first used the threat of resignation to get his way and then accepted a fundamentally flawed plan to get any operation underway at all.

However, the plan followed the old Japanese tactic of confusing the opponent by appearing in many places at once. This strategy had been used successfully during the first months of the war. However, US signals intelligence had, through an historic breakthrough in the field of cryptanalysis, revealed the Japanese plan. The multiple attacks, meant to deceive, therefore became a fatal division of strength for Japan.

ONCE THE OPERATION began in late May, Yamamoto chose to exercise overall command from the battleship *Yamato*, despite the fact that measures taken to protect communications would hamper his ability to lead the battles. Thus, Yamamoto received information that a planned 'picket line' of submarines north of Hawaii would be delayed and that reconnaissance flights over Pearl Harbor would be cancelled without being able to pass on

this intelligence to the commander of the aircraft carrier en route to Midway, Vice Admiral Nagumo.

Even worse, the navy's intelligence department informed Yamamoto that there were indications that US aircraft carriers had left Pearl Harbor. After much anguish, the admiral refrained from passing this on to Nagumo – there was always the possibility that he'd 'eavesdropped' on the messages between Tokyo and his superior.

THE ASSAULT ON Midway was a total disaster for Japan, with the loss of all four aircraft carriers. A significant reason for this was Japan's strategy to split its forces. Halting the Aleutian operation would have freed up two more aircraft carriers for the Midway attack, which could have made a huge difference. The Battle of Midway became the turning point for the entire Pacific War, and Yamamoto would continue to lead the country's fleet in a series of defensive battles in the Solomon Islands, where its aviation and naval resources were worn down, despite several tactical victories.

In April 1943, US intelligence managed to intercept and decrypt a radio message containing the itinerary of a tour of inspection that Yamamoto was due to take, including a visit to a base on the island of Bougainville. The US then arranged an ambush in which a long-range P-38 fighter jet flew from Guadalcanal and shot down the Japanese admiral's plane as it was about to land.

Yamamoto remains an icon, and his character has appeared in 12 films and nine novels. ★

Johan Lupander is an author and military history writer.

Japanese invasion forces storm the Solomon Islands in March 1942.

WORLD WAR II'S WARLORDS

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WORLD WAR II'S WARLORDS



Erwin Rommel ADMIRIED BY HIS

OPPONENTS

Erwin Rommel's tactics and command philosophy were simple: make quick decisions and put them into action immediately. This enabled the **Desert Fox** to stay one step ahead of his opponents, and won the legendary field marshal the admiration of both sides during his career.

by JIMMY LINDSAY

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (left) in North Africa (above) in the desert of Tunisia, March 1943.

“70 years after his death, Rommel remains a unique, almost unfathomable figure”

“W... Rommel was a brilliant commander, a tactical genius, and a man of great courage. He was a man who was admired by his opponents as well as his allies. He was a man who was a legend in his own time.”

“Rommel was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time.”



GEORGY ZHUKOV Stalin's greatest marshal

At the height of his career, he was hated, feared and admired. He was then pushed aside and ignored. Now Stalin's top commander, Georgy Zhukov, is once again a celebrated hero in post-Soviet Russia.

by NICKLAS BRUNNEN

“There was no indication that the boy would become one of the country's most important generals”

“Zhukov was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time.”

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The Desert Fox became a legend

Rommel's tactical and operational achievements fuelled German war propaganda.

Soviet chief went from hero to zero

Georgy Zhukov's ability as a field commander is still debated more than 80 years on.



He went down in history as Britain's top army commander during World War II. At the same time, despite all his victories, Montgomery has been ranked as one of the worst generals ever, mainly due to his personality. Mathias Forsberg rates "Monty's" efforts, from North Africa to Remagen.

by MATTHIAS FORSBERG

AVERAGE OR BRILLIANT GENERAL?

“Monty was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time.”

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General Douglas MacArthur broke US troops in the Philippines in 1945.

by NICKLAS BRUNNEN

Douglas MacArthur Hot-headed war hero

“On 9th January 1945, US troops were able to land on Luzon and MacArthur announced: 'I have returned'”

“MacArthur was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time. He was a man who was a legend in his own time.”

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Montgomery comes under scrutiny

He successfully led the British in North Africa and across the Rhine – but did he deserve all the glory?

Ruthless towards friend and foe

Douglas MacArthur's ego grew with every military success, but arrogance ultimately led to his downfall.

